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BRET HARTE.

VOL. VII.

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BRET HARTE

FROM THE ORIGINAL PAINTING BY JOHN PETTIE, R.A.

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TALES OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE—II.

WITH A PORTRAIT BY JOHN PETTIE, R.A.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

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A Ward of the Golden Gate.

PROLOGUE.

IN San Francisco the "rainy season" had been making itself a reality to the wondering Eastern immigrant. There were short days of drifting clouds and flying sunshine, and long succeeding nights of incessant downpour, when the rain rattled on the thin shingles or drummed on the resounding zinc of pioneer roofs. The shifting sand-dunes on the outskirts were beaten motionless and sodden by the onslaught of consecutive storms; the south-east trades brought the saline breath of the outlying Pacific even to the busy haunts of Commercial and Kearney Streets; the low-lying Mission Road was a quagmire; along the City Front, despite of piles and pier and wharf, the Pacific tides still asserted themselves in mud and ooze as far as Sansome Street; the wooden side-walks of Clay and Montgomery Streets were mere floating bridges or buoyant pontoons superposed on elastic bogs; Battery Street was the Silurian beach of that early period on which tin cans, packing-boxes, freight, household furniture, and even the runaway crews of deserted ships had been cast away. There were dangerous and unknown depths in Montgomery Street and on the Plaza, and the wheels of a passing carriage hopelessly mired had to be lifted by the volunteer hands of a half-dozen high-booted wayfarers, whose wearers were sufficiently content to believe that a woman, a child,

or an invalid was behind its closed windows, without troubling themselves or the occupant by looking through the glass.

It was a carriage that, thus released, eventually drew up before the superior public edifice known as the City Hall. From it a woman, closely veiled, alighted, and quickly entered the building. A few passers-by turned to look at her, partly from the rarity of the female figure at that period, and partly from the greater rarity of its being well-formed and even lady-like.

As she kept her way along the corridor and ascended an iron staircase, she was passed by others more pre-occupied in business at the various public offices. One of these visitors, however, stopped as if struck by some fancied resemblance in her appearance, turned, and followed her. But when she halted before a door marked "Mayor's Office," he paused also, and, with a look of half-humorous bewilderment, and a slight glance around him as if seeking for some one to whom to impart his arch fancy, he turned away. The woman then entered a large ante-room with a certain quick feminine gesture of relief, and, finding it empty of other callers, summoned the porter, and asked him some question in a voice so suppressed by the official severity of the apartment as to be hardly audible. The attendant replied by entering another room marked "Mayor's Secretary," and reappeared with a stripling of seventeen or eighteen, whose singularly bright eyes were all that was youthful in his composed features. After a slight scrutiny of the woman—half boyish, half official—he desired her, to be seated, with a certain exaggerated gravity as if he was over-acting a grown-up part, and, taking a card from her, re-entered his office. Here, however, he did *not* stand on his head or call out a confederate youth from a closet, as the woman might have expected. To the left was a green-

baize door, outlined with brass-studded rivets like a cheerful coffin-lid, and bearing the mortuary inscription "Private." This he pushed open, and entered the Mayor's private office.

The municipal dignitary of San Francisco, although an erect, soldier-like man of strong middle age, was seated with his official chair tilted back against the wall and kept in position by his feet on the rungs of another, which in turn acted as a support for a second man, who was seated a few feet from him in an easy-chair. Both were lazily smoking.

The Mayor took the card from his secretary, glanced at it, said "Hullo!" and handed it to his companion, who read aloud "Kate Howard," and gave a prolonged whistle.

"Where is she?" asked the Mayor.

"In the ante-room, sir."

"Any one else there?"

"No, sir."

"Did you say I was engaged?"

"Yes, sir; but it appears she asked Sam who was with you, and when he told her she said, All right, she wanted to see Colonel Pendleton too."

The men glanced interrogatively at each other, but Colonel Pendleton, abruptly anticipating the Mayor's functions, said, "Have her in," and settled himself back in his chair.

A moment later the door opened, and the stranger appeared. As she closed the door behind her she removed her heavy veil, and displayed the face of a very handsome woman of past thirty. It is only necessary to add that it was a face known to the two men, and all San Francisco.

"Well, Kate," said the Mayor, motioning to a chair, but without rising or changing his attitude. "Here I am, and here is Colonel Pendleton, and these are office hours. What can we do for you?"

If he had received her with magisterial formality, or even

politely, she would have been embarrassed, in spite of a certain boldness of her dark eyes and an ever-present consciousness of her power. It is possible that his own ease and that of his companion was part of their instinctive good-nature and perception. She accepted it as such, took the chair familiarly, and seated herself sideways upon it, her right arm half-encircling its back and hanging over it; altogether an easy and not ungraceful pose.

"Thank you, Jack—I mean, Mr. Mayor—and you too, Harry. I came on business. I want you two men to act as guardians for my little daughter."

"Your what?" asked the two men simultaneously.

"My daughter," she repeated, with a short laugh, which, however, ended with a note of defiance. "Of course, you don't know. Well," she added half-aggressively, and yet with the air of hurrying over a compromising and inexplicable weakness, "the long and short of it is I've got a little girl down at the Convent of Santa Clara, and have had—there! I've been taking care of her—*good* care, too, boys—for some time. And now I want to put things square for her for the future. See? I want to make over to her all my property—it's nigh on to seventy-five thousand dollars, for Bob Snelling put me up to getting those water lots a year ago—and, you see, I'll have to have regular guardians, trustees, or whatever you call 'em, to take care of the money for her."

"Who's her father?" asked the Mayor.

"What's that to do with it?" she said impetuously.

"Everything—because he's her natural guardian."

"Suppose he isn't known? Say dead, for instance."

"Dead will do," said the Mayor gravely. "Yes, dead will do," repeated Colonel Pendleton. After a pause, in which the two men seemed to have buried this vague relative, the Mayor looked keenly at the woman.

"Kate, have you and Bob Ridley had a quarrel?"

"Bob Ridley knows too much to quarrel with me," she said briefly.

"Then you are doing this for no motive other than that which you tell me?"

"Certainly. That's motive enough—ain't it?"

"Yes." The Mayor took his feet off his companion's chair and sat upright. Colonel Pendleton did the same, also removing his cigar from his lips. "I suppose you'll think this thing over?" he added.

"No—I want it done *now*—right here—in this office."

"But you know it will be irrevocable."

"That's what I want it to be—something might happen afterwards."

"But you are leaving nothing for yourself, and if you are going to devote everything to this daughter, and lead a different life, you'll——"

"Who said I was?"

The two men paused, and looked at her.

"Look here, boys, you don't understand. From the day that paper is signed, I've nothing to do with the child: She passes out of my hands into yours, to be schooled, educated, and made a rich girl out of—and never to know who or what or where *I* am. She doesn't know now. I haven't given her and myself away in that style—you bet! She thinks I'm only a friend. She hasn't seen me more than once or twice, and not to know me again. Why, I was down there the other day, and passed her walking out with the Sisters and the other scholars, and she didn't know me—though one of the Sisters did. But they're mum, *they* are, and don't let on. Why, now I think of it, *you* were down there, Jack, presiding in big style as Mr. Mayor at the exercises. You must have noticed her. Little thing, about nine—lot of hair, the same colour as

mine, and brown eyes. White and yellow sash. Had a necklace on of real pearls I gave her. *I bought them*, you understand, myself at Tucker's—gave two hundred and fifty dollars for them—and a big bouquet of white rosebuds and lilacs I sent her."

"I remember her now on the platform," said the Mayor gravely. "So that is your child?"

"You bet—no slouch either. But that's neither here nor there. What I want now is you and Harry to look after her and her property the same as if I didn't live. More than that, as if I had *never lived*. I've come to you two boys, because I reckon you're square men and won't give me away. But I want to fix it even firmer than that. I want you to take hold of this trust not as Jack Hammersley, but as the *Mayor of San Francisco*! And when you make way for a new Mayor, *he* takes up the trust by virtue of his office, you see, so there's a trustee all along. I reckon there'll always be a San Francisco and always a Mayor—at least till the child's of age; and it gives her from the start a father, and a pretty big one too. Of course the new man isn't to know the why and wherefore of this. It's enough for him to take on that duty with his others, without asking questions. And he's only got to invest that money and pay it out as it's wanted, and consult Harry at times."

The two men looked at each other with approving intelligence. "But have you thought of a successor for *me*, in case somebody shoots me on sight any time in the next ten years?" asked Pendleton, with a gravity equal to her own.

"I reckon, as you're President of the El Dorado Bank, you'll make that a part of every President's duty too. You'll get the directors to agree to it, just as Jack here will get the Common Council to make it the Mayor's business."

The two men had risen to their feet, and, after exchanging glances, gazed at her silently. Presently the Mayor said—

“It can be done, Kate, and we’ll do it for you—eh, Harry?”

“Count me in,” said Pendleton, nodding.

“But you’ll want a third man.”

“What’s that for?”

“The casting vote in case of any difficulty.”

The woman’s face fell. “I reckoned to keep it a secret with only you two,” she said half-bitterly.

“No matter. We’ll find some one to act, or you’ll think of somebody and let us know.”

“But I wanted to finish this thing right here,” she said impatiently. She was silent for a moment, with her arched black brows knitted. Then she said abruptly, “Who’s that smart little chap that let me in? He looks as if he might be trusted.”

“That’s Paul Hathaway, my secretary. He’s sensible, but too young. Stop! I don’t know about that. There’s no legal age necessary, and he’s got an awfully old head on him,” said the Mayor thoughtfully.

“And *I* say his youth’s in his favour,” said Colonel Pendleton promptly. “He’s been brought up in San Francisco, and he’s got no d——d old-fashioned Eastern notions to get rid of, and will drop into this as a matter of business, without prying about or wondering. *I’ll* serve with him.”

“Call him in!” said the woman.

He came. Very luminous of eye, and composed of lip and brow, yet with the same suggestion of “making believe” very much, as if to offset the possible munching of forbidden cakes and apples in his own room, or the hidden presence of some still in his pocket.

The Mayor explained the case briefly, but with business-like precision. "Your duty, Mr. Hathaway," he concluded, "at present will be merely nominal and, above all, confidential. Colonel Pendleton and myself will set the thing going." As the youth—who had apparently taken in and "illuminated" the whole subject with a single bright-eyed glance—bowed and was about to retire, as if to relieve himself of his real feelings behind the door, the woman stopped him with a gesture.

"Let's have this thing over now," she said to the Mayor. "You draw up something that we can all sign at once." She fixed her eyes on Paul, partly to satisfy her curiosity and justify her predilection for him, and partly to detect him in any overt act of boyishness. But the youth simply returned her glance with a cheerful, easy prescience, as if her past lay clearly open before him. For some minutes there was only the rapid scratching of the Mayor's pen over the paper. Suddenly he stopped and looked up.

"What's her name?"

"She mustn't have mine," said the woman quickly. "That's a part of my idea. I give that up with the rest. She must take a new name that gives no hint of me. Think of one, can't you, you two men? Something that would kind of show that she was the daughter of the city, you know."

"You couldn't call her 'Santa Francisca,' eh?" said Colonel Pendleton doubtingly.

"Not much," said the woman, with a seriousness that defied any ulterior insinuation.

"Nor Chrysopolinia?" said the Mayor musingly.

"But that's only a *first* name. She must have a family name," said the woman impatiently.

"Can *you* think of something, Paul?" said the Mayor, appealing to Hathaway. "You're a great reader, and later from your classics than I am." The Mayor, albeit practical

and Western, liked to be ostentatiously forgetful of his old Alma Mater, Harvard, on occasions.

"How would *Yerba Buena* do, sir?" responded the youth gravely. "It's the old Spanish title of the first settlement here. It comes from the name that Father Junipero Serra gave to the pretty little vine that grows wild over the sandhills, and means 'Good herb.' He called it 'A balm for the wounded and sore.'"

"For the wounded and sore?" repeated the woman slowly.

"That's what they say," responded Hathaway.

"You ain't playing us, eh?" she said, with a half-laugh that, however, scarcely curved the open mouth with which she had been regarding the young secretary.

"No," said the Mayor hurriedly. "It's true. I've often heard it. And a capital name it would be for her too. *Yerba* the first name, *Buena* the second. She could be called Miss Buena when she grows up."

"*Yerba Buena* it is," she said suddenly. Then, indicating the youth with a slight toss of her handsome head, "His head's level—you can see that."

There was a silence again, and the scratching of the Mayor's pen continued. Colonel Pendleton buttoned up his coat, pulled his long moustache into shape, slightly arranged his collar, and walked to the window without looking at the woman. Presently the Mayor arose from his seat, and, with a certain formal courtesy that had been wanting in his previous manner, handed her his pen and arranged his chair for her at the desk. She took the pen, and rapidly appended her signature to the paper. The others followed, and, obedient to a sign from him, the porter was summoned from the outer office to witness the signatures. When this was over, the Mayor turned to his secretary. "That's all just now, Paul."

Accepting this implied dismissal with undisturbed gravity, the newly-made youthful guardian bowed and retired. When the green-baize door had closed upon him, the Mayor turned abruptly to the woman with the paper in his hand.

"Look here, Kate; there is still time for you to reconsider your action, and tear up this solitary record of it. If you choose to do so, say so, and I promise you that this interview, and all you have told us, shall never pass beyond these walls. No one will be the wiser for it, and we will give you full credit for having attempted something that was too much for you to perform."

She had half risen from her chair when he began, but fell back again in her former position and looked impatiently from him to his companion, who was also regarding her earnestly.

"What are you talking about?" she said sharply.

"*You*, Kate," said the Mayor. "You have given everything you possess to this child. What provision have you made for yourself?"

"Do I look played out?" she said, facing them.

She certainly did not look like anything but a strong, handsome, resolute woman; but the men did not reply.

"That is not all, Kate," continued the Mayor, folding his arms and looking down upon her. "Have you thought what this means? It is the complete renunciation not only of any claim but any interest in your child. That is what you have just signed, and what it will be our duty now to keep you to. From this moment we stand between you and her, as we stand between her and the world. Are you ready to see her grow up away from you, losing even the little recollection she has had of your kindness—passing you in the street without knowing you, perhaps even having you pointed out to her as a person she should

avoid? Are you prepared to shut your eyes and ears henceforth to all that you may hear of her new life, when she is happy, rich, respectable, a courted heiress—perhaps the wife of some great man? Are you ready to accept that she will never know—that no one will ever know—that *you* had any share in making her so, and that if you should ever breathe it abroad we shall hold it our duty to deny it, and brand the man who takes it up for you as a liar and the slanderer of an honest girl?”

“That’s what I came here for,” she said curtly; then, regarding them curiously, and running her ringed hand up and down the railed back of her chair, she added, with a half-laugh, “What are you playin’ me for, boys?”

“But,” said Colonel Pendleton, without heeding her, “are you ready to know that in sickness or affliction you will be powerless to help her; that a stranger will take your place at her bedside, that as she has lived without knowing you she will die without that knowledge, or that if through any weakness of yours it came to her then, it would embitter her last thoughts of earth, and, dying, she would curse you?”

The smile upon her half-open mouth still fluttered around it, and her curved fingers still ran up and down the rails of the chair-back as if they were the chords of some mute instrument, to which she was trying to give voice. Her rings once or twice grated upon them as if she had at times gripped them closely. But she rose quickly when he paused, said “Yes” sharply, and put the chair back against the wall.

“Then I will send you copies of this to-morrow, and take an assignment of the property.”

“I’ve got the cheque here for it now,” she said, drawing it from her pocket and laying it upon the desk. “There; I reckon that’s finished. Good-bye!”

The Mayor took up his hat, Colonel Pendleton did the same; both men preceded her to the door, and held it open with grave politeness for her to pass.

"Where are you boys going?" she asked, glancing from the one to the other.

"To see you to your carriage, Mrs. Howard," said the Mayor, in a voice that had become somewhat deeper.

"Through the whole building? Past all the people in the hall and on the stairs? Why, I passed Dan Stewart as I came in."

"If you will allow us?" he said, turning half-appealingly to Colonel Pendleton, who without speaking made a low bow of assent.

A slight flush rose to her face—the first and only change in the even healthy colour she had shown during the interview.

"I reckon I won't trouble you, boys, if it's all the same to you," she said, with her half-strident laugh. "*You* mightn't mind being seen—but *I* would. Good-bye."

She held out a hand to each of the men, who remained for an instant silently holding them. Then she passed out of the door, slipping on her close black veil as she did so with a half-funereal suggestion, and they saw her tall handsome figure fade into the shadows of the long corridor.

"Paul," said the Mayor, re-entering the office and turning to his secretary, "do you know who that woman is?"

"Yes, sir."

"She's one in a million! And now forget that you have ever seen her."

CHAPTER I.

THE principal parlour of the New Golden Gate Hotel in San Francisco, fairly reported by the local press as being "truly palatial" in its appointments and unrivalled in its upholstery, was nevertheless, on August 5, 1860, of that startling newness that checked any familiarity, and evidently had produced some embarrassment in the limbs of four visitors who had just been ushered into its glories. After hesitating before one or two gorgeous fawn-coloured brocaded easy-chairs of appalling and spotless virginity, one of them seated himself despairingly on a *tête-à-tête* sofa in marked and painful isolation, while another sat uncomfortably upright on a sofa. The two others remained standing, vaguely gazing at the ceiling, and exchanging ostentatiously admiring but hollow remarks about the furniture in unnecessary whispers. Yet they were apparently men of a certain habit of importance and small authority, with more or less critical attitude in their speech.

To them presently entered a young man of about five-and-twenty, with remarkably bright and singularly sympathetic eyes. Having swept the group in a smiling glance, he singled out the lonely occupier of the *tête-à-tête*, and moved pleasantly towards him. The man rose instantly with an eager, gratified look.

"Well, Paul, I didn't allow you'd remember me. It's a matter of four years since we met at Marysville. And now you're bein' a great man, you've——"

No one could have known from the young man's smiling face that he really had not recognised his visitor at first, and that his greeting was only an exhibition of one of those

happy instincts for which he was remarkable. But, following the clue suggested by his visitor, he was able to say promptly and gaily—

"I don't know why I should forget Tony Shear or the Marysville boys," turning with a half-confiding smile to the other visitors, who, after the human fashion, were beginning to be resentfully impatient of this special attention.

"Well, no—for I've allus said that you took your first start from Marysville. But I've brought a few friends of our party—that I reckoned to introduce to you. Cap'en Stidger, Chairman of our Central Committee; Mr. Henry J. Hoskins, of the firm of Hoskins & Bloomer; and Joe Slate, of the *Union Press*, one of our most promising journalists. Gentlemen," he continued, suddenly and without warning lifting his voice to an oratorical plane in startling contrast to his previous unaffected utterance, "I needn't say that this is the Honourable Paul Hathaway—the youngest State Senator in the Legislature. You know his record!" Then recovering the ordinary accents of humanity, he added, "We read of your departure last night from Sacramento, and I thought we'd come early, afore the crowd."

"Proud to know you, sir," said Captain Stidger, suddenly lifting the conversation to the platform again. "I have followed your career, sir. I've read your speech, Mr. Hathaway, and, as I was telling our mutual friend, Mr. Shear, as we came along, I don't know any man that could state the real Party issues as squarely. Your castigating exposition of so-called Jeffersonian principles, and your relentless indictment of the resolutions of '98 were—were"—coughed the Captain, dropping into conversation again—"were the biggest thing out. You have only to signify the day, sir, that you will address us, and I can promise you the largest audience in San Francisco."

"I'm instructed by the proprietor of the *Union Press*," said Mr. Slate, feeling for his notebook and pencil, "to offer you its columns for any explanations you may desire to make in the form of a personal letter or an editorial in reply to the *Advertiser's* strictures on your speech, or to take any information you may have for the benefit of our readers and the Party."

"If you are ever down my way, Mr. Hathaway," said Mr. Hoskins, placing a large business card in Hathaway's hand, "and will drop in as a friend, I can show you about the largest business in the way of canned provisions and domestic groceries in the State, and give you a look around Battery Street generally. Or if you'll name your day, I've got a pair of 2'35 Blue Grass horses that'll spin you out to the Cliff House to dinner and back. I've had Governor Fiske, and Senator Doolan, and that big English capitalist who was here last year, and they—well, sir—they were *pleased*! Or if you'd like to see the town—if this is your first visit—I'm on hand to show you."

Nothing could exceed Mr. Hathaway's sympathetic acceptance of their courtesies, nor was there the least affectation in it. Thoroughly enjoying his fellow-men, even in their foibles, they found him irresistibly attractive. "I lived here seven years ago," he said smilingly to the speaker.

"When the water came up to Montgomery Street," interposed Mr. Shear, in a hoarse but admiring aside.

"When Mr. Hammersley was Mayor," continued Hathaway.

"Had an official position—private secretary—afore he was twenty," explained Shear, in perfectly audible confidence.

"Since then the city has made great strides, leaping full-grown, sir, in a single night," said Captain Stidger, hastily ascending the rostrum again with a mixed metaphor,

to the apparent concern of a party of handsomely dressed young ladies who had recently entered the parlour. "Stretching from South Park to Black Point, and running back to the Mission Dolores and the Presidio, we are building up a metropolis, sir, worthy to be placed beside the Golden Gate that opens to the broad Pacific and the shores of far Cathay! When the Pacific Railroad is built we shall be the natural terminus of the Pathway of Nations!"

Mr. Hathaway's face betrayed no consciousness that he had heard something like this eight years before, and that much of it had come true, as he again sympathetically responded. Neither was his attention attracted by a singular similarity which the attitude of the group of ladies on the other side of the parlour bore to that of his own party. They were clustered around one of their own number—a striking-looking girl—who was apparently receiving their mingled flatteries and caresses with a youthful yet critical sympathy which, singularly enough, was not unlike his own. It was evident also that an odd sort of rivalry seemed to spring up between the two parties, and that, in proportion as Hathaway's admirers became more marked and ostentatious in their attentions, the supporters of the young girl were equally effusive and enthusiastic in their devotion. As usual in such cases, the real contest was between the partisans themselves; each successive demonstration on either side was provocative or retaliatory, and when they were apparently rendering homage to their idols they were really distracted by and listening to each other. At last, Hathaway's party being reinforced by fresh visitors, a tall brunette of the opposition remarked in a professedly confidential but perfectly audible tone—

"Well, my dear, as I don't suppose you want to take part in a political caucus, perhaps we'd better return to the

Ladies' Boudoir, unless there's a committee sitting there too."

"I know how valuable your time must be, as you are all business men," said Hathaway, turning to his party, in an equally audible tone; "but before you go, gentlemen, you must let me offer you a little refreshment in a private room," and he moved naturally towards the door. The rival fair, who had already risen at their commander's suggestion, here paused awkwardly over an embarrassing victory. Should they go or stay? The object of their devotion, however, turned curiously towards Hathaway. For an instant their eyes met. The young girl turned carelessly to her companions and said, "No; stay here—it's the public parlour," and her followers, evidently accustomed to her authority, sat down again.

"A galaxy of young ladies from the Convent of Santa Clara, Mr. Hathaway," explained Captain Stidger, naïvely oblivious of any discourtesy on their part, as he followed Hathaway's glance and took his arm as they moved away. "Not the least of our treasures, sir. Most of them daughters of pioneers—and all Californian bred and educated. Connoisseurs have awarded them the palm, and declare that for Grace, Intelligence, and Woman's Highest Charms the East cannot furnish their equal." Having delivered this Parthian compliment in an oratorical passage through the doorway, the Captain descended, outside, into familiar speech. "But I suppose you will find that out for yourself if you stay here long. San Francisco might furnish a fitting bride to California's youngest Senator."

"I am afraid that my stay here must be brief, and limited to business," said Hathaway, who had merely noticed that the principal girl was handsome and original-looking. "In fact, I am here partly to see an old acquaintance—Colonel Pendleton."

The three men looked at each other curiously. "Oh! Harry Pendleton," said Mr. Hoskins incredulously. "You don't know *him*?"

"An old pioneer—of course," interposed Shear, explanatorily and apologetically. "Why, in Paul's time the Colonel was a big man here."

"I understand the Colonel has been unfortunate," said Hathaway gravely; "but in *my* time he was President of the El Dorado Bank."

"And the bank hasn't got through its settlement yet," said Hoskins. "I hope *you* ain't expecting to get anything out of it?"

"No," said Hathaway, smiling; "I was a boy at that time, and lived up to my salary. I know nothing of his bank difficulties, but it always struck me that Colonel Pendleton was himself an honourable man."

"It ain't that," said Captain Stidger energetically; "but the trouble with Harry Pendleton is that he hasn't grown with the State, and never adjusted himself to it. And he won't. He thinks the Millennium was between the fall of '49 and the spring of '50, and after that everything dropped. He belongs to the old days, when a man's simple *word* was good for any amount if you knew him; and they say that the old bank hadn't a scrap of paper for half that was owing to it. That was all very well, sir, in '49 and '50, and—Luck; but it won't do for '59 and '60, and—Business! And the old man can't see it."

"But he is ready to fight for it now, as in the old time," said Mr. Slate; "and that's another trouble with his chronology. He's done more to keep up duelling than any other man in the State, and don't know the whole spirit of progress and civilisation is against it."

It was impossible to tell from Paul Hathaway's face whether his sympathy with Colonel Pendleton's foibles or

his assent to the criticisms of his visitors was the truer. Both were no doubt equally sincere. But the party was presently engaged in the absorption of refreshment, which, being of a purely spirituous and exhilarating quality, tended to increase their good humour with the host till they parted. Even then a gratuitous advertisement of his virtues and their own intentions in calling upon him was oratorically voiced from available platforms and landings, in the halls and stairways, until it was pretty well known throughout the Golden Gate Hotel that the Hon. Mr. Paul Hathaway had arrived from Sacramento, and had received a "spontaneous ovation."

Meantime the object of it had dropped into an easy-chair by the window of his room, and was endeavouring to recall a less profitable memory. The process of human forgetfulness is not a difficult one between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six, and Paul Hathaway had not only fulfilled the Mayor's request by forgetting the particulars of a certain transfer that he had witnessed in the Mayor's office, but in the year succeeding that request, being about to try his fortunes in the mountains, he had formally constituted Colonel Pendleton to act as his proxy in the administration of Mrs. Howard's singular Trust, in which, however, he had never participated except yearly to sign his name. He was, consequently, somewhat astonished to have received a letter a few days before from Colonel Pendleton, asking him to call and see him regarding it.

He vaguely remembered that it was eight years ago, and eight years had worked considerable change in the original trustees, greatest of all in his superior officer, the Mayor, who had died the year following, leaving his trusteeship to his successor in office, whom Paul Hathaway had never seen. The Bank of El Dorado, despite Mrs. Howard's sanguine belief, had long been in bankruptcy, and, although

Colonel Pendleton still survived it, it was certain that no other president would succeed to his office as trustee, and that the function would lapse with him. Paul himself, a soldier of fortune, although habitually lucky, had only lately succeeded to a profession—if his political functions could be so described. Even with his luck, energy, and ambition, while everything was possible, nothing was secure. It seemed, therefore, as if the soulless official must eventually assume the duties of the two sympathising friends who had originated them, and had stood *in loco parentis* to the constructive orphan. The mother, Mrs. Howard, had disappeared a year after the Trust had been made—it was charitably presumed in order to prevent any complications that might arise from her presence in the country. With these facts before him, Paul Hathaway was more concerned in wondering what Pendleton could want with him than, I fear, any direct sympathy with the situation. On the contrary, it appeared to him more favourable for keeping the secret of Mrs. Howard's relationship, which would now die with Colonel Pendleton and himself; and there was no danger of any emotional betrayal of it in the cold official administration of a man who had received the Trust through the formal hands of successive predecessors. He had forgotten the time limited for the guardianship, but the girl must soon be of age and off their hands. If there had ever been any romantic or chivalrous impression left upon his memory by the scene in the Mayor's office, I fear he had put it away with various other foolish illusions of his youth, to which he now believed he was superior.

Nevertheless, he would see the Colonel, and at once, and settle the question. He looked at the address, "St. Charles' Hotel." He remembered an old hostelry of that name, near the Plaza. Could it be possible that it had survived the alterations and improvements of the city?

It was an easy walk through remembered streets, yet with changed shops and houses and faces. When he reached the Plaza, scarce recognisable in its later frontages of brick and stone, he found the old wooden building still intact, with its villa-like galleries and verandahs incongruously and ostentatiously overlooked by two new and aspiring erections on either side. For an instant he tried to recall the glamour of old days. He remembered when his boyish eyes regarded it as the crowning work of opulence and distinction; he remembered a ball given there on some public occasion, which was to him the acme of social brilliancy and display. How tawdry and trivial it looked beside those later and more solid structures! How inconsistent were those long latticed verandahs and balconies, pathetic record of that first illusion of the pioneers that their climate was a tropical one! A restaurant and billiard-saloon had aggrandised all of the lower storey; but there was still the fanlight, over which the remembered title of "St. Charles," in gilded letters, was now reinforced by the too demonstrative legend, "Apartments and Board, by the Day or Week." Was it possible that this narrow, creaking staircase had once seemed to him the broad steps of Fame and Fortune? On the first landing a pre occupied Irish servant-girl, with a mop, directed him to a door at the end of the passage, at which he knocked. The door was opened by a grizzled negro servant, who was still holding a piece of oily chamois-leather in his hand; and the contents of a duelling-case, scattered upon a table in the centre of the room, showed what had been his occupation. Admitting Hathaway with great courtesy, he said—

"Marse Harry bin havin' his ole trubble, sah, and bin engaged just dis momen' on his toylet; ef yo'll accomodate yo'self on de sofa, I inform him yo' is heah."

As the negro passed into the next room, Paul cast a

hasty glance around the apartment. The furniture, originally rich and elegant, was now worn threadbare and lustreless. A bookcase, containing, among other volumes, a few law books—there being a vague tradition, as Paul remembered, that Colonel Pendleton had once been connected with the law—a few French chairs of tarnished gilt, a rifle in the corner, a presentation sword in a mahogany case, a few classical prints on the walls, and one or two iron deed-boxes marked “El Dorado Bank,” were the principal objects. A mild flavour of dry decay and methyated spirits pervaded the apartment. Yet it was scrupulously clean and well kept, and a few clothes neatly brushed and folded on a chair bore witness to the servant’s care. As Paul, however, glanced behind the sofa, he was concerned to see a coat, which had evidently been thrust hurriedly in a corner, with the sleeve lining inside out, and a needle and thread still sticking in the seam. It struck him instantly that this had been the negro’s occupation, and that the pistol-cleaning was a polite fiction.

“Yo’ll have to skuse Marse Harry seein’ yo’ in bed, but his laig’s pow’ful bad to-day, and he can’t stand,” said the servant, re-entering the room. “Skuse me, sah,” he added in a dignified confidential whisper, half closing the door with his hand, “but if yo’ wouldn’t mind avoidin’ ’xcitin’ or controversial topics in yo’ conversation it would be de better fo’ him.”

Paul smilingly assented, and the black retainer, with even more than the usual solemn ceremonious exaggeration of his race, ushered him into the bedroom. It was furnished in the same faded glory as the sitting-room, with the exception of a low iron camp-bedstead, in which the tall soldierly figure of Colonel Pendleton, clad in threadbare silk dressing-gown, was stretched. He had changed in eight years; his hair had become grey, and was thinned

over the sunken temples, but his iron-grey moustache was still particularly long and well pointed. His face bore marks of illness and care; there were deep lines down the angle of the nostril that spoke of alternate savage outbreak and repression, and gave his smile a sardonic rigidity. His dark eyes, that shone with the exaltation of fever, fixed Paul's on entering, and with the tyranny of an invalid never left them.

"Well, Hathaway?"

With the sound of that voice Paul felt the years slip away, and he was again a boy, looking up admiringly to the strong man, who now lay helpless before him. He had entered the room with a faint sense of sympathising superiority and a consciousness of having had experience in controlling men. But all this fled before Colonel Pendleton's authoritative voice; even its broken tones carried the old dominant spirit of the man, and Paul found himself admiring a quality in his old acquaintance that he missed in his newer friends.

"I haven't seen you for eight years, Hathaway. Come here and let me look at you."

Paul approached the bedside with boyish obedience. Pendleton took his hand and gazed at him critically.

"I should have recognised you, sir, for all your moustache and your inches. The last time I saw you was in Jack Hammersley's office. Well, Jack's dead, and here I am, little better, I reckon. You remember Hammersley's house?"

"Yes," said Paul, albeit wondering at the question.

"Something like this, Swiss villa style. I remember when Jack put it up. Well, the last time I was out, I passed there. And what do you think they've done to it?"

Paul could not imagine.

"Well, sir," said the Colonel gravely, "they've changed it into a Church Missionary shop and Young Men's Christian Reading-room! But, that's 'progress' and 'improvement'!" He paused, and, slowly withdrawing his hand from Paul's, added with grim apology, "You're young, and belong to the new school, perhaps. Well, sir, I've read your speech; I don't belong to your Party—mine died ten years ago—but I congratulate you. George! Confound it! where's that boy gone?"

The negro indicated by this youthful title, although he must have been ten years older than his master, after a hurried shuffling in the sitting-room, eventually appeared at the door.

"George, champagne and materials for cocktails for the gentleman. The *best*, you understand. No new-fangled notions from that new barkeeper."

Paul, who thought he observed a troubled blinking in George's eyelid, and referred it to a fear of possible excitement for his patient, here begged his host not to trouble himself—that he seldom took anything in the morning.

"Possibly not, sir; possibly not," returned the Colonel hastily. "I know the new ideas are prohibitive and some other blank thing, but you're safe here from your constituents, and by gad, sir, I shan't force you to take it! It's *my* custom, Hathaway—an old one—played out, perhaps, like all the others, but a custom nevertheless, and I'm only surprised that George, who knows it, should have forgotten it."

"Fack is, Marse Harry," said George, with feverish apology, "it bin gone 'scaped my mind dis mo'nin' in de prerogation ob business, but I'm goin' now shuah!" and he disappeared.

"A good boy, sir, but beginning to be contaminated. Brought him here from Nashville over ten years ago.

Eight years ago they proved to him that he was no longer a slave, and made him d——d unhappy until I promised him it should make no difference to him, and he could stay. I had to send for his wife and child—of course, a dead loss of eighteen hundred dollars when they set foot in the State—but I'm blanked if he isn't just as miserable with them here, for he has to take two hours in the morning and three in the afternoon every day to be with 'em. I tried to get him to take his family to the mines and make his fortune, like those fellows they call bankers and operators and stockbrokers nowadays; or to go to Oregon, where they'll make him some kind of a mayor or sheriff—but he won't. He collects my rents on some little property I have left, and pays my bills, sir, and, if this blank civilisation would only leave him alone, he'd be a good enough boy."

Paul couldn't help thinking that the rents George collected were somewhat inconsistent with those he was evidently mending when he arrived, but at that moment the jingle of glasses was heard in the sitting-room, and the old negro reappeared at the door. Drawing himself up with ceremonious courtesy, he addressed Paul. "Wo'd yo' mind, sah, taking a glance at de wine for yo' choice?" Paul rose, and followed him into the sitting-room, when George carefully closed the door. To his surprise Hathaway beheld a tray with two glasses of whisky and bitters, but no wine. "Skuse me, sah," said the old man with dignified apology, "but de Kernel won't have any but de best champagne for hono'ble gemmen like yo'self, and I'se despaired to say it can't be got in de house or de subburbs. De best champagne dat we gives visitors is the Widder Glencoe. Wo'd yo' mind, sah, for de sake o' not 'xcitin' de Kernel wid triflin' culinary matter, to say dat yo' don' take but de one brand?"

"Certainly," said Paul, smiling, "I really don't care for anything so early;" then, returning to the bedroom, he said carelessly, "You'll excuse me taking the liberty, Colonel, of sending away the champagne and contenting myself with whisky. Even the best brand—the Widow Cliquot"—with a glance at the gratified George—"I find rather trying so early in the morning."

"As you please, Hathaway," said the Colonel, somewhat stiffly. "I dare say there's a new fashion in drinks now, and a gentleman's stomach is a thing of the past. Then, I suppose, we can spare the boy, as this is his time for going home. Put that tin box with the Trust papers on the bed, George, and Mr. Hathaway will excuse your waiting." As the old servant made an exaggerated obeisance to each, Paul remarked, as the door closed upon him, "George certainly keeps his style, Colonel, in the face of the progress you deplore."

"He was always a 'dandy nigger,'" returned Pendleton, his face slightly relaxing as he glanced after his grizzled henchman, "but his exaggeration of courtesy is a blank sight more natural and manly than the exaggeration of discourtesy which your superior civilised 'helps' think is self-respect. The excuse of servitude of any kind is its spontaneity and affection. When you know a man hates you and serves you from interest, you know he's a cur and you're a tyrant. It's your blank progress that's made menial service degrading by teaching men to avoid it. Why, sir, when I first arrived here, Jack Hammersley and myself took turns as cook to the party. I didn't consider myself any the worse master for it. But enough of this." He paused, and, raising himself on his elbow, gazed for some seconds half-cautiously, half-doubtfully, upon his companion. "I've got something to tell you, Hathaway," he said slowly. "You've had an easy time with this

Trust ; your share of the work hasn't worried you, kept you awake nights, or interfered with your career. I understand perfectly," he continued, in reply to Hathaway's deprecating gesture. "I accepted to act as your proxy, and I *have*. I'm not complaining. But it is time that you should know what I've done, and what you may still have to do. Here is the record. On the day after that interview in the Mayor's office, the El Dorado Bank, of which I was and still am president, received seventy-five thousand dollars in trust from Mrs. Howard. Two years afterwards, on that same day, the bank had, by lucky speculations, increased that sum to the credit of the Trust one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, or double the original capital. In the following year the bank suspended payment."

CHAPTER II.

IN an instant the whole situation and his relations to it flashed upon Paul with a terrible but almost grotesque completeness. Here he was, at the outset of his career, responsible for the wasted fortune of the daughter of a social outcast, and saddled with her support ! He now knew why Colonel Pendleton had wished to see him ; for one shameful moment he believed he also knew why he had been content to take his proxy ! The questionable character of the whole transaction, his own carelessness, which sprang from that very confidence and trust that Pendleton had lately extolled—what *would*, what *could* not be made of it ! He already heard himself abused by his opponents—perhaps, more terrible still, faintly excused by his friends. All this was visible in his pale face and flashing eyes as he turned them on the helpless invalid.

Colonel Pendleton received his look with the same critical

half-curious scrutiny that had accompanied his speech. At last his face changed slightly, a faint look of disappointment crossed his eyes, and a sardonic smile deepened the lines of his mouth.

"There, sir," he said hurriedly, as if dismissing an unpleasant revelation; "don't alarm yourself! Take a drink of that whisky. You look pale. Well; turn your eyes on those walls. You don't see any of that money laid out here—do you? Look at me. I don't look like a man enriched with other people's money—do I? Well, let that content you. Every dollar of that Trust fund, Hathaway, with all the interests and profits that have accrued to it, is *safe*! Every cent of it is locked up in Government Bonds with Rothschild's agent. There are the receipts, dated a week before the bank suspended. But enough of *that*—*that* isn't what I asked you to come and see me for."

The blood had rushed back to Paul's cheeks uncomfortably. He saw now, as impulsively as he had previously suspected his co-trustee, that the man had probably ruined himself to save the Trust. He stammered that he had not questioned the management of the fund nor asked to withdraw his proxy.

"No matter, sir," said the Colonel impatiently; "you had the right, and, I suppose," he added with half-concealed scorn, "it was your duty. But let that pass. The money is safe enough; but, Mr. Hathaway—and this is the point I want to discuss with you—it begins to look as if the *secret* was safe no longer!" He had raised himself with some pain and difficulty to draw nearer to Paul, and had again fixed his eyes eagerly upon him. But Paul's responsive glance was so vague that he added quickly, "You understand, sir; I believe that there are hounds—I say hounds!—who would be able to blurt out at any moment that that girl at Santa Clara is Kate Howard's daughter."

At any other moment Paul might have questioned the gravity of any such contingency, but the terrible earnestness of the speaker, his dominant tone, and a certain respect which had lately sprung up in his breast for him, checked him, and he only asked, with as much concern as he could master for the moment—

“What makes you think so?”

“That’s what I want to tell you, Hethaway, and how I, and I alone, am responsible for it. When the bank was in difficulty, and I made up my mind to guard the Trust with my own personal and private capital, I knew that there might be some comment on my action. It was a delicate matter to show any preference or exclusion at such a moment, and I took two or three of my brother directors whom I thought I could trust into my confidence. I told them the whole story, and how the Trust was sacred. I made a mistake, sir,” continued Pendleton sardonically, “a grave mistake. I did not take into account that even in three years civilisation and religion had gained ground here. There was a hound there—a blank Judas in the Trust. Well; he didn’t see it. I think he talked Scripture and morality. He said something about the wages of sin being infamous and only worthy of confiscation. He talked about the sins of the father being visited upon the children, and justly. I stopped him. Well! Do you know what’s the matter with my ankle? Look!” He stopped, and with some difficulty and invincible gravity throwing aside his dressing-gown, turned down his stocking, and exposed to Paul’s gaze the healed cicatrix of an old bullet-wound. “Troubled me damnably near a year. Where I hit *him*—hasn’t troubled him at all since!

“I think,” continued the Colonel, falling back upon the pillow with an air of relief, “that he told others—of his own kidney, sir—though it was a secret among gentlemen.

But they have preferred to be silent now—than *afterwards*. They know that I'm ready. But I can't keep this up long; some time, you know, they're bound to improve in practice and hit higher up! As far as I'm concerned," he added, with a grim glance around the faded walls and threadbare furniture, "it don't mind; but *mine* isn't the mouth to be stopped." He paused, and then abruptly, yet with a sudden and pathetic dropping of his dominant note, said, "Hathaway, you're young, and Hammersley liked you—what's to be done? I thought of passing over my tools to you. You can shoot, and I hear you *have*. But the h—l of it is that if you dropped a man or two people would ask *why*, and want to know what it was about; while, when I do, nobody here thinks it anything but *my way*! I don't mean that it would hurt you with the crowd to wipe out one or two of these hounds during the canvass, but the trouble is that they belong to *your Party*, and," he added grimly, "that wouldn't help your career."

"But," said Paul, ignoring the sarcasm, "are you not magnifying the effect of a disclosure? The girl is an heiress, excellently brought up. Who will bother about the antecedents of the mother, who has disappeared, whom she never knew, and who is legally dead to her?"

"In my day, sir, no one who knew the circumstances," returned the Colonel quickly. "But we are living in a blessed era of Christian retribution and civilised propriety, and I believe there are a lot of men and women about who have no other way of showing their own virtue than by showing up another's vice. We're in a reaction of reform. It's the old drunkards who are always more clamorous for total abstinence than the moderately temperate. I tell you, Hathaway, there couldn't be an unluckier moment for our secret coming out."

"But she will be of age soon."

"In two months."

"And sure to marry."

"Marry!" repeated Pendleton, with grim irony. "Would *you* marry her?"

"That's another question," said the young man promptly, "and one of individual taste; but it does not affect my general belief that she could easily find a husband as good and better."

"Suppose she found one *before* the secret came out. Ought he to be told?"

"Certainly."

"And that would imply telling *her*?"

"Yes," said Paul, but not so promptly.

"And you consider *that* fulfilling the promise of the Trust—the pledges exchanged with that woman?" continued Pendleton, with glittering eyes and a return to his old dominant tone.

"My dear Colonel," said Paul, somewhat less positively, but still smiling, "you have made a romantic, almost impossible compact with Mrs. Howard, that, you yourself are now obliged to admit, circumstances may prevent your carrying out substantially. You forget, also, that you have just told me that you have already broken your pledge—under circumstances, it is true, that do you honour—and that now your desperate attempts to retrieve it have failed. Now I really see nothing wrong in your telling to a presumptive well-wisher of a girl what you have told to her enemy."

There was a dead silence. The prostrate man uttered a slight groan, as if in pain, and drew up his leg to change his position. After a pause he said, in a restrained voice, "I differ from you, Mr. Hathaway; but enough of this for the present. I have something else to say. It will be necessary for one of us to go at once to Santa Clara and see Miss Yerba Buena."

"Good heavens!" said Paul quickly. "Do you call her *that*?"

"Certainly, sir. *You* gave her the name. Have you forgotten?"

"I only suggested it," returned Paul hopelessly; "but no matter—go on."

"I cannot go there, as you see," continued Pendleton, with a weary gesture towards his crippled ankle; "and I should particularly like you to see her before we make the joint disposition of her affairs with the Mayor two months hence. I have some papers you can show her, and I have already written a letter introducing you to the Lady Superior at the convent and to her. You have never seen her?"

"No," said Paul. "But, of course, you have?"

"Not for three years."

Paul's eyes evidently expressed some wonder, for a moment after the Colonel added, "I believe, Hathaway, I am looked upon as a queer survival of a rather lawless and improper past. At least, I have thought it better not socially to compromise her by my presence. The Mayor goes there—at the examinations and exercises, I believe, sir; they make a sort of reception for him—with a—a—banquet—lemonade and speeches."

"I had intended to leave for Sacramento to-morrow night," said Paul, glancing curiously at the helpless man; "but I will go there if you wish."

"Thank you. It will be better."

There were a few words of further explanation of the papers, and Pendleton placed the packet in his visitor's hand. Paul rose. Somehow it appeared to him that the room looked more faded and forgotten than when he entered it, and the figure of the man before him more lonely, helpless, and abandoned. With one of his sympathetic impulses he said—

"I don't like to leave you here alone. Are you sure you can help yourself without George? Can I do anything before I go?"

"I am quite accustomed to it," said Pendleton quietly. "It happens once or twice a year, and when I go out—well—I miss more than I do here."

He took Paul's proffered hand mechanically, with a slight return of the critical doubting look he had cast upon him when he entered. His voice, too, had quite recovered its old dominance as he said, with half-patronising conventionality, "You'll have to find your way out alone. Let me know how you have sped at Santa Clara, will you? Good-bye."

The staircase and passage seemed to have grown shabbier and meaner as Paul slowly and hesitatingly descended to the street. At the foot of the stairs he paused irresolutely, and loitered with a vague idea of turning back on some pretence, only that he might relieve himself of the sense of desertion. He had already determined upon making that inquiry into the Colonel's personal and pecuniary affairs which he had not dared to offer personally, and had a half-formed plan of testing his own power and popularity in a certain line of relief that at once satisfied his sympathies and ambitions. Nevertheless, after reaching the street, he lingered a moment, when an odd idea of temporising with his inclinations struck him. At the farther end of the hotel—one of the parasites living on its decayed fortunes—was a small barber's shop. By having his hair trimmed and his clothes brushed, he could linger a little longer beneath the same roof with the helpless solitary, and perhaps come to some conclusion. He entered the clean but scantily-furnished shop, and threw himself into one of the nearest chairs, hardly noting that there were no other customers, and that a single assistant, strolling a

razor behind a glass door, was the only occupant. But there was a familiar note of exaggerated politeness about the voice of this man as he opened the door and came towards the back of the chair with the formula—

“Mo’nin’, sah! Shall we hab de pleshure of shavin’ or hah-cuttin’ dis mo’nin’?” Paul raised his eyes quickly to the mirror before him. It reflected the black face and grizzled hair of George.

More relieved at finding the old servant still near his master than caring to comprehend the reason, Hathaway said pleasantly, “Well, George, is this the way you look after your family?”

The old man started; for an instant his full red lips seemed to become dry and ashen, the whites of his eyes were suffused and staring, as he met Paul’s smiling face in the glass. But almost as quickly he recovered himself, and, with a polite but deprecating bow, said, “For God sake, sah! I admit de sarkumstances is agin me, but de simple fack is dat I’m temper’ly occupyin’ de place of an ole frien’, sah, who is called round de cornah.”

“And I’m devilish glad of any fact, George, that gives me a chance of having my hair cut by Colonel Pendleton’s right-hand man. So fire away!”

The gratified smile which now suddenly overspread the whole of the old man’s face, and seemed to quickly stiffen the rugged and wrinkled fingers that had at first trembled in drawing a pair of shears from a ragged pocket, appeared to satisfy Paul’s curiosity for the present. But after a few moments’ silent snipping, during which he could detect in the mirror some traces of agitation still twitching the negro’s face, he said with an air of conviction—

“Look here, George—why don’t you regularly use your leisure moments in this trade? You’d make your fortune by your taste and skill at it.”

For the next half-minute the old man's frame shook with silent childlike laughter behind Paul's chair. "Well, Marse Hathaway, yo's an ole frien' o' my massa, and a gemman yo'self, sah, and a Senetah, and I doan' mind tellen' yo'—dat's jess what I bin gone done! It makes a little ready money for de ole woman and de chillern. But de Kernel don' know. Ah, sah, de Kernel kill me or hisself if he so much as spiced me. De Kernel is high toned, sah!—being a gemman yo'self, yo' understand. He wouldn't heah of his niggah worken' for two massas—for all he's agree'ble to lemme go and help myself. But, Lord bless yo,' sah, dat ain't in de cate'gory! De Kernel couldn't get along widout me."

"You collect his rents, don't you?" said Paul quietly.

"Yes, sah."

"Much?"

"Well, no, sah; not so much as fom'ly, sah! Yo' see, de Kernel's proppety lies in de ole parts of de town, where de po' white folks lib, and dey ain't reglar. De Kernel dat sof' in his heart, he doant press 'em; some of 'em is ole fo'ty niners like hisself, sah; and some is Spanish, sah, and dey is sof' too, and ain't no more gumption dan chillern, and tink it's ole time come agin, and dey's in de ole places like afo' de Mexican Wah! and dey don' bin' payin' nothin'. But we gets along, sah—we gets along, not in de *prima facie* style, sah! mebbe not in de modden way dat de Kernel don't like; but we keeps ourse'f, sah, and has wine fo' our friends. When yo' come again, sah, yo'll find de Widder Glencoe on de sideboard."

"Has the Colonel many friends here?"

"Mos' de ole ones bin done gone, sah, and de Kernel don' cotton to de new. He don' mix much in sassiety tiil de bank settlements bin gone done. Skuse me, sah!—but yo' don' happen to know when dat is? It would be a

pow'ful heap off de Kernel's mind if it was done. Bein' a high and mighty man in Committees up dah in Sacramento, sah, I didn't know but what yo' might know as it might come befo' yo' "

"I'll see about it," said Paul, with an odd abstracted smile.

"Shampoo dis mornen', sah?"

"Nothing more in this line," said Paul, rising from his chair, "but something more, perhaps, in the line of your other duties. You're a good barber for the public, George, and I don't take back what I said about your future; but *just now* I think the Colonel wants all your service. He's not at all well. Take this," he said, putting a twenty dollar gold piece in the astonished servant's hand, "and for the next three or four days drop the shop, and under some pretext or another arrange to be with him. That money will cover what you lose here, and as soon as the Colonel's all right again you can come back to work. But are you not afraid of being recognised by some one?"

"No, sah, dat's just it. On'y strangers dat don' know no better come yere."

"But suppose your master should drop in? It's quite convenient to his rooms."

"Marse Harry in a barber-shop!" said the old man, with a silent laugh. "Skuse me, sah," he added, with an apologetic mixture of respect and dignity, "but fo' twenty years no man hez touched de Kernel's chin but myself. When Marse Harry hez to go to a barber's shop, it won't make no matter who's dar."

"Let's hope he will not," said Paul gaily; then, anxious to evade the gratitude which since his munificence he had seen beaming in the old negro's eye and evidently trying to find polysyllabic and elevated expression on his lips, he said hurriedly, "I shall expect to find you with the Colonel when I call again in a day or two," and smilingly departed.

At the end of two hours George's barber-employer returned to relieve his assistant, and, on receiving from him an account and a certain percentage of the afternoon's fees (minus the gift from Paul), was informed by George that he should pretermitt his attendance for a few days. "Udder private and personal affairs," explained the old negro, who made no social distinction in his vocabulary, "peroccupyin' dis niggah's time." The head barber, unwilling to lose a really good assistant, endeavoured to dissuade him by the offer of increased emolument, but George was firm.

As he entered the sitting-room the Colonel detected his step, and called him in.

"Another time, George, never allow a guest of mine to send away wine. If he don't care for it, put it on the side-board."

"Yes, sah; but as yo' didn't like it yo'self, Marse Harry, and de wine was de most 'xpensive quality ob Glencoe——"

"D—n the expense!" He paused, and gazed searchingly at his old retainer.

"George," he said suddenly, yet in a gentle voice, "don't lie to me, or"—in a still kinder voice—"I'll flog the black skin off you! Listen to me. *Have* you got any money left?"

"'Deed, sah, dere *is*," said the negro earnestly. "I'll jist fetch it wid de accounts."

"Hold on! I've been thinking, lying here, that if the Widow Molloy can't pay because she sold out, and that tobacconist is ruined, and we've had to pay the water-tax for old Bill Soames, the rent last week don't amount to much, while there's the month's bill for the restaurant and that blank druggist's account for lotions and medicines to come out of it. It strikes me we're pretty near touching bottom. I've everything I want here, but, by God, sir, if I find *you* skimping yourself or lying to me, or borrowing money——"

"Yes, Marse Harry, but the Widow Molloy done gone and paid up dis afernoon. I'll bring de books and money to prove it," and he hurriedly re-entered the sitting-room.

Then with trembling hands he emptied his pockets on the table, including Paul's gift and the fees he had just received, and opening a desk-drawer, took from it a striped cotton handkerchief, such as negro women wear on their heads, containing a small quantity of silver tied up in a hard knot, and a boy's purse. This he emptied on the table with his own money.

They were the only rents of Colonel Henry Pendleton! They were contributed by "George Washington Thomson;" his wife, otherwise known as "Aunt Dinah," washerwoman; and "Scipio Thomson," their son, aged fourteen, bootblack. It did not amount to much. But in that happy moisture that dimmed the old man's eyes, God knows it looked large enough.

CHAPTER III.

ALTHOUGH the rays of an unclouded sun were hot in the Santa Clara roads and byways, and the dry bleached dust had become an impalpable powder, the perspiring and parched pedestrian who rashly sought relief in the shade of the wayside oak was speedily chilled to the bone by the north-west trade-winds that on those August afternoons swept through the defiles of the coast range, and even penetrated the pastoral valley of San José. The anomaly of straw hats and overcoats with the occupants of buggies and station waggons was thus accounted for, and even in the sheltered garden of "El Rosario" two young girls in light summer dresses had thrown wraps over their shoulders as they lounged down a broad rose-alley at right angles with the deep long verandah of the *casa*. Yet, in spite of

the chill, the old Spanish house and gardens presented a luxurious, almost tropical, picture from the roadside. Banks, beds, and bowers of roses lent their name and colour to the grounds; tree-like clusters of hanging-fuchsias, mound-like masses of variegated verbena, and tangled thickets of ceanothus and spreading heliotrope were set in boundaries of venerable olive, fig, and pear-trees. The old house itself, a picturesque relief to the glaring newness of the painted villas along the road, had been tastefully modified to suit the needs and habits of a later civilisation; the galleries of the inner courtyard, or *patio*, had been transferred to the outside walls in the form of deep verandahs, while the old adobe walls themselves were hidden beneath flowing Cape jessamine or bestarred passion vines, and topped by roofs of cylindrical red tiles.

"Miss Yerba!" said a dry masculine voice from the verandah.

The taller young girl started, and drew herself suddenly behind a large Castilian rose-tree, dragging her companion with her, and putting her finger imperatively upon a pretty but somewhat passionate mouth. The other girl checked a laugh, and remained watching her friend's wickedly levelled brows in amused surprise.

The call was repeated from the verandah. After a moment's pause there was the sound of retreating footsteps, and all was quiet again.

"Why, for goodness' sake, didn't you answer, Yerba?" asked the shorter girl.

"Oh, I hate him!" responded Yerba. "He only wanted to bore me with his stupid, formal, sham-parental talk. Because he's my official guardian he thinks it necessary to assume this manner towards me when we meet, and treats me as if I were something between his stepdaughter and

an almshouse orphan or a police board. It's perfectly ridiculous, for it's only put on while he is in office ; and he knows it, and I know it, and I'm tired of making believe. Why, my dear, they change every election ; I've had seven of them, all more or less of this kind, since I can remember."

"But I thought there were two others, dear, that were not official?" said her companion coaxingly.

Yerba sighed. "No ; there was another, who was president of a bank, but that was also to be official if he died. I used to like him, he seemed to be the only gentleman among them ; but it appears that he is dreadfully improper ; shoots people now and then for nothing at all, and burst up his bank—and, of course, he's impossible, and, as there's no more bank, when he dies there'll be no more trustee."

"And there's the third, you know—a stranger, who never appears?" suggested the younger girl.

"And who do you suppose *he* turns out to be? Do you remember that conceited little wretch—that 'Baby Senator,' I think they called him—who was in the parlour of the Golden Gate the other morning surrounded by his idiotic worshippers and toadies and ballot-box stuffers? Well, if you please, *that's* Mr. Paul Hathaway—the Honourable Paul Hathaway, who washed his hands of me, my dear, at the beginning!"

"But really, Yerba, I thought that he looked and acted——"

"You thought of nothing at all, Milly," returned Yerba with authority. "I tell you he's a mass of conceit. What else could you expect of a Man—toadied and fawned upon to that extent? It made me sick! I could have just shaken them!"

As if to emphasise her statement, she grasped one of the long willowy branches of the enormous rose-bush where she stood, and shook it lightly. The action detached a

few of the maturer blossoms, and sent down a shower of faded pink petals on her dark hair and yellow dress. "I can't bear conceit," she added.

"Oh. Yerba, just stand as you are! I do wish the girls could see you. You make the *loveliest* picture!"

She certainly did look very pretty as she stood there—a few leaves lodged in her hair, clinging to her dress, and suggesting by reflection the colour that her delicate satin skin would have resented in its own texture. But she turned impatiently away—perhaps not before she had allowed this passing vision to impress the mind of her devoted adherent—and said, "Come along, or that dreadful man will be out on the verandah again."

"But, if you dislike him so, why did you accept the invitation to meet him here at luncheon?" said the curious Milly.

"I didn't accept; the Mother Superior did for me, because he's the Mayor of San Francisco visiting your uncle, and she's always anxious to please the powers that be. And I thought he might have some information that I could get out of him. And it was better than being in the convent all day. And I thought I could stand *him* if you were here."

Milly gratefully accepted this doubtful proof of affection by squeezing her companion's arm. "And you didn't get any information, dear?"

"Of course not! The idiot knows only the old tradition of his office—that I was a mysterious Trust left in Mayor Hammersley's hands. He actually informed me that 'Buena' meant 'Good'; that it was likely the name of the captain of some whaler that put into San Francisco in the early days, whose child I was, and that, if I chose to call myself 'Miss Good,' he would allow it, and get a Bill passed in the Legislature to legalise it. Think of it, my dear!—'Miss Good,' like one of Mrs. Barbauld's stories, or a moral governess in the 'Primary Reader.'"

"'Miss Good,'" repeated Milly innocently. "Yes, you might put an *e* at the end—G-double-o-d-e. There are Goodes in Philadelphia. And then you won't have to sacrifice that sweet pretty 'Yerba,' that's so stylish and musical, for you'd still be 'Yerba Good.' But," she added, as Yerba made an impatient gesture, "why do you worry yourself about *that*? You wouldn't keep your own name long, whatever it was. An heiress like you, dear—lovely and accomplished—would have the best names as well as the best men in America to choose from."

"Now, please, don't repeat that idiot's words. That's what *he* says; that's what they *all* say!" returned Yerba pettishly. "One would really think it was necessary for me to get married to become anybody at all, or have any standing whatever. And, whatever you do, don't go talking of me as if I were named after a vegetable. 'Yerba Buena' is the name of an island in the bay just off San Francisco. I'm named after that."

"But I don't see the difference, dear. The island was named after the vine that grows on it."

"*You* don't see the difference?" said Yerba darkly. "Well, *I* do. But what are you looking at?"

Her companion had caught her arm, and was gazing intently at the house.

"Yerba," she said quickly, "there's the Mayor, and uncle, and a strange gentleman coming down the walk. They're looking for us. And, as I live, Yerb! the strange gentleman is that young Senator, Mr. Hathaway!"

"Mr. Hathaway? Nonsense!"

"Look for yourself."

Yerba glanced at the three gentlemen, who, a hundred yards distant, were slowly advancing in the direction of the ceanothus hedge, behind which the girls had instinctively strayed during their conversation.

"What are you going to do?" said Milly eagerly. "They're coming straight this way. Shall we stay here and let them pass, or make a run for the house?"

"No," said Yerba, to Milly's great surprise. "That would look as if we cared. Besides, I don't know that Mr. Hathaway has come to see *me*. We'll stroll out and meet them accidentally."

Milly was still more astonished. However, she said, "Wait a moment, dear!" and, with the instinctive deftness of her sex, in three small tugs and a gentle hitch, shook Yerba's gown into perfect folds, passed her fingers across her forehead and over her ears, securing, however, with a hairpin on their passage three of the rose petals where they had fallen. Then, discharging their faces of any previous expression, these two charming hypocrites sallied out innocently into the walk. Nothing could be more natural than their manner: if a criticism might be ventured upon, it was that their elbows were slightly drawn inwards and before them, leaving their hands gracefully advanced in the line of their figures, an attitude accepted throughout the civilised world of deportment as indicating fastidious refinement not unmingled with permissible hauteur.

The three gentlemen lifted their hats at this ravishing apparition, and halted. The Mayor advanced with great politeness.

"I feared you didn't hear me call you, Miss Yerba, so we ventured to seek you." As the two girls exchanged almost infantile glances of surprise, he continued, "Mr. Paul Hathaway has done us the honour of seeking you here, as he did not find you at the convent. You may have forgotten that Mr. Hathaway is the third one of your trustees."

"And so inefficient and worthless that I fear he doesn't count," said Paul; "but," raising his eyes to Yerba's, "I

fancy that I have already had the pleasure of seeing you, and, I fear, the mortification of having disturbed you and your friends in the parlour of the Golden Gate Hotel yesterday."

The two girls looked at each other with the same child-like surprise. Yerba broke the silence by suddenly turning to Milly. "Certainly, you remember how greatly interested we were in the conversation of a party of gentlemen who were there when we came in. I am afraid our foolish prattle must have disturbed *you*. I know that we were struck with the intelligent and eloquent devotion of your friends."

"Oh, perfectly," chimed in the loyal but somewhat infelix Milly; "and it was so kind and thoughtful of Mr. Hathaway to take them away as he did."

"I felt the more embarrassed," continued Hathaway, smiling, but still critically examining Yerba for an indication of something characteristic beyond this palpable conventionality, "as I unfortunately must present my credentials from a gentleman as much of a stranger as myself—Colonel Pendleton."

The trade-wind was evidently making itself felt even in this pastoral retreat, for the two gentlemen appeared to shrink slightly within themselves, and a chill seemed to have passed over the group. The Mayor coughed. The avuncular Woods gazed abstractedly at a large cactus. Even Paul, prepared by previous experience, stopped short.

"Colonel Pendleton! Oh, do tell me all about him!" flashed out Yerba suddenly, with clasped hands and eager girlish breath.

Paul cast a quick, grateful glance at the girl. Whether assumed or not, her enthusiastic outburst was effective. The Mayor looked uneasily at Woods, and turned to Paul.

"Ah yes! You and he were original co-trustees. I believe Pendleton is in reduced circumstances. Never quite got over that bank trouble."

"That is only a question of legislative investigation and relief," said Paul lightly, yet with purposely vague official mystery of manner. Then, turning quickly to Yerba, as if replying to the only real question at issue, he continued pointedly, "I am sorry to say the Colonel's health is so poor that it keeps him quite a recluse. I have a letter from him and a message for you." His bright eyes added plainly, "as soon as we can get rid of those people."

"Then you think that a bill——" began the Mayor eagerly.

"I think, my dear sir," said Paul plaintively, "that I and my friends have already tried the patience of these two young ladies quite enough yesterday with politics and law-making. I have to catch the six-o'clock train to San Francisco this evening, and have already lost the time I hoped to spend with Miss Yerba by missing her at the convent. Let me stroll on here, if you like, and if I venture to monopolise the attention of this young lady for half an hour, you, my dear Mr. Mayor, who have more frequent access to her, I know will not begrudge it to me."

He placed himself beside Yerba and Milly, and began an entertaining, although, I fear, slightly exaggerated account of his reception by the Lady Superior, and her evident doubts of his identity with the trustee mentioned in Pendleton's letter of introduction. "I confess she frightened me," he continued, "when she remarked that, according to my statement, I could have been only eighteen years old when I became your guardian, and as much in want of one as you were. I think that only her belief that Mr. Woods and the Mayor would detect me as an impostor provoked her at last to tell me your whereabouts."

"But why *did* they ever make you a trustee, for goodness' sake?" said Milly naïvely. "Was there no one grown up at that time that they could have called upon?"

"Those were the *early* days of California," responded

Paul, with great gravity, although he was conscious that Yerba was regarding him narrowly, "and I probably looked older and more intelligent than I really was. For, candidly," with the consciousness of Yerba's eyes still upon him, "I remember very little about it. I dare say I was selected, as you kindly suggest, 'for goodness' sake.'"

"After all," said the volatile Milly, who seemed inclined, as chaperon, to direct the conversation, "there was something pretty and romantic about it. You two poor young things taking care of each other, for, of course, there were no women here in those days."

"Of course there *were* women here," interrupted Yerba quickly, with a half-meaning, half-interrogative glance at Paul that made him instinctively uneasy. "You later comers"—to Milly—"always seem to think that there was nothing here before you!" She paused, and then added, with a naïve mixture of reproach and coquetry that was as charming as it was unexpected, "As to taking care of each other, Mr. Hathaway very quickly got rid of me, I believe."

"But I left you in better hands, Miss Yerba; and let me thank you now," he added in a lower tone, "for recognising it as you did a moment ago. I'm glad that you instinctively liked Colonel Pendleton. Had you known him better, you would have seen how truthful that instinct was. His chief fault in the eyes of our worthy friends is that he reminds them of a great deal they can't perpetuate and much they would like to forget." He checked himself abruptly. "But here is your letter," he resumed, drawing Colonel Pendleton's missive from his pocket; "perhaps you would like to read it now, in case you have any message to return by me. Miss Woods and I will excuse you."

They had reached the end of the rose-alley, where a summer-house that was in itself a rose-bower partly disclosed itself. The other gentlemen had lagged behind. "I will

amuse *myself*, and console your other guardian, dear," said the vivacious Milly, with a rapid exchange of glances with Yerba, "until this horrid business is over. Besides," she added with cheerful vagueness, "after so long a separation you must have a great deal to say to each other."

Paul smiled as she rustled away, and Yerba, entering the summer-house, sat down and opened the letter. The young man remained leaning against the rustic archway, occasionally glancing at her and at the moving figures in the gardens. He was conscious of an odd excitement which he could trace to no particular cause. It was true that he had been annoyed at not finding the young girl at the convent, and at having to justify himself to the Lady Superior for what he conceived to be an act of gratuitous kindness; nor was he blind to the fact that his persistence in following her was more an act of aggression against the enemies of Pendleton than of concern for Yerba. She was certainly pretty; but he could not remember her mother sufficiently to trace any likeness, and he had never admired the mother's pronounced beauty. She had flashed out for an instant into what seemed originality and feeling. But it had passed, and she had asked no further questions in regard to the Colonel.

She had hurriedly skimmed through the letter, which seemed to be composed of certain figures and accounts. "I suppose it's all right," she said: "at least, you can say so if he asks you. It's only an explanation why he has transferred my money from the bank to Rothschild's agent years ago. I don't see why it should interest me *now*."

Paul made no doubt that it was the same transfer that had shipwrecked the Colonel's fortune and alienated his friends, and could not help replying somewhat pointedly, "But I think it should, Miss Yerba. I don't know what the Colonel explained to you—doubtless not the whole

truth, for he is not a man to praise himself; but the fact is, the bank was in difficulties at the time of that transfer, and to make it he sacrificed his personal fortune, and, I think, awakened some of that ill-feeling you have just noticed." He checked himself too late: he had again lost not only his tact and self-control, but had nearly betrayed himself. He was surprised that the girl's justifiable ignorance should have irritated him. Yet she had evidently not noticed, or misunderstood it, for she said, with a certain precision that was almost studied—

"Yes, I suppose it would have been a terrible thing to him to have been suspected of misappropriating a Trust confided to him by parties who had already paid him the high compliment of confiding to his care a secret and a fortune."

Paul glanced at her quickly with astonishment. Was this ignorance, or suspicion? Her manner, however, suddenly changed, with the charming capriciousness of youth and conscious beauty. "He speaks of you in this letter," she said, letting her dark eyes rest on him provokingly.

"That accounts for your lack of interest, then," said Paul gaily, relieved to turn a conversation fraught with so much danger.

"But he speaks very flatteringly," she went on. "He seems to be another one of your admirers. I'm sure, Mr. Hathaway, after that scene in the hotel parlour yesterday, *you* at least cannot complain of having been misrepresented before *me*. To tell you the truth, I think I hated you a little for it."

"You were quite right," returned Paul. "I must have been insufferable! And I admit that I was slightly piqued against *you* for the idolatries showered upon you at the same moment by your friends."

Usually, when two young people have reached the point of confidingly exchanging their first impressions of each

other, some progress has been made in first acquaintance. But it did not strike Paul in that way, and Yerba's next remark was discouraging.

"But I'm rather disappointed, for all that Colonel Pendleton tells me you know nothing of my family or of the secret."

Paul was this time quite prepared, and withstood the girl's scrutiny calmly. "Do you think," he asked lightly, "that even *he* knows?"

"Of course he does," she returned quickly. "Do you suppose he would have taken all that trouble you have just talked about if he didn't know it? And feared the consequences, perhaps?" she added, with a slight return of her previous expressive manner.

Again Paul was puzzled and irritated, he knew not why. But he only said pleasantly, "I differ from you there. I am afraid that such a thing as fear never entered into Colonel Pendleton's calculations on any subject. I think he would act the same towards the highest and the lowest, the powerful or the most weak." As she glanced at him quickly and mischievously, he added, "I am quite willing to believe that his knowledge of you made his duty pleasanter."

He was again quite sincere, and his slight sympathy had that irresistible quality of tone and look which made him so dangerous. For he was struck with the pretty soothed self-complacency that had shone in her face since he had spoken of Pendleton's equal disinterestedness. It seemed, too, as if what he had taken for passion or petulance in her manner had been only a resistance to some continual aggression of condition. With that remainder held in check, a certain latent nobility was apparent, as of her true self. In this moment of pleased abstraction she had drawn through the lattice-work of one of the windows a spray of roses still clinging to the vine, and, with her graceful head a little on one side, was softly caressing her cheek with it.

She certainly was very pretty. From the crown of her dark little head to the narrow rosetted slipper that had been idly tapping the ground, but now seemed to tread it more proudly, with arched instep and small ankle, she was pleasant to look upon.

"But you surely have something else to think about, Miss Yerba?" said the young man with conviction. "In a few months you will be of age, and rid of those dreadfully stupid guardians; with your——"

The loosened rose-spray flew from her hand out of the window as she made a gesture, half real, half assumed, of imploring supplication. "Oh, please, Mr. Hathaway, for Heaven's sake don't *you* begin too! You are going to say that, with my wealth, my accomplishments, my beauty, my friends, what more can I want? What do I care about a secret that can neither add to them nor take them away? Yes, you were! It's the regular thing to say—everybody says it. Why, I should have thought 'the youngest Senator' could afford to have been more original."

"I plead guilty to *all* the weaknesses of humanity," said Paul warmly, again beginning to believe that he had been most unjust to her independence.

"Well, I forgive you, because you have forgotten to say that, if I don't like the name of Yerba Buena, I could *so* easily change that too."

"But you *do* like it," said Paul, touched with this first hearing of her name in her own musical accents, "or would like it if you heard yourself pronounce it." It suddenly recurred to him, with a strange thrill of pleasure, that he himself had given it to her. It was as if he had created some musical instrument to which she had just given voice. In his enthusiasm he had thrown himself on the bench beside her in an attitude that, I fear, was not as dignified as became his elderly office.

"But you don't think that is my *name*," said the girl quickly.

"I beg your pardon?" said Paul hesitatingly.

"You don't think that anybody would have been so utterly idiotic as to call me after a ground-vine—a vegetable?" she continued petulantly.

"Eh?" stammered Paul.

"A name that could be so easily translated," she went on half-scornfully, "and, when translated, was no possible title for anybody? Think of it—Miss Good Herb! It is too ridiculous for anything."

Paul was not usually wanting in self-possession in an emergency, or in skill to meet attack. But he was so convinced of the truth of the girl's accusation, and now recalled so vividly his own consternation on hearing the result of his youthful and romantic sponsorship for the first time from Pendleton, that he was struck with confusion.

"But what do you suppose it was intended for?" he said at last vaguely. "It was certainly 'Yerba Buena' in the Trust. At least, I suppose so," he corrected himself hurriedly.

"It is only a supposition," she said quietly, "for you know it cannot be proved. The Trust was never recorded, and the only copy could not be found among Mr. Hammersley's papers. It is only part of the name, of which the first is lost."

"Part of the name?" repeated Paul uneasily.

"Part of it. It is a corruption of *de la Yerba Buena*—of the Yerba Buena—and refers to the island of Yerba Buena in the bay, and not to the plant. That island was part of the property of my family—the Arguellos—you will find it so recorded in the Spanish grants. My name is Arguello *de la Yerba Buena*."

It is impossible to describe the timid yet triumphant, the

half-appealing yet complacent, conviction of the girl's utterance. A moment before Paul would have believed it impossible for him to have kept his gravity and his respect for his companion under this egregious illusion. But he kept both. For a sudden conviction that she suspected the truth, and had taken this audacious and original plan of crushing it, overpowered all other sense. The Arguellos, it flashed upon him, were an old Spanish family, former owners of Yerba Buena Island, who had in the last years become extinct. There had been a story that one of them had eloped with an American ship captain's wife at Monterey. The legendary history of early Spanish California was filled with more remarkable incidents, corroborated with little difficulty from Spanish authorities, who, it was alleged, lent themselves readily to any fabrication or forgery. There was no racial pride; on the contrary, they had shown an eager alacrity to ally themselves with their conquerors. The friends of the Arguellos would be proud to recognise and remember in the American heiress the descendant of their countrymen. All this passed rapidly through his mind after the first moment of surprise; all this must have been the deliberate reasoning of this girl of seventeen, whose dark eyes were bent upon him. Whether she was seeking corroboration or complicity he could not tell.

"Have you found this out yourself?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes. One of my friends at the convent was Josita Castro; she knew all the history of the Arguellos. She is perfectly satisfied."

For an instant Paul wondered if it was a joint conception of the two schoolgirls. But, on reflection, he was persuaded that Yerba would commit herself to no accomplice—of her own sex. She might have dominated the girl, and would make her a firm partisan, while the girl would be convinced

of it herself, and believe herself a free agent. He had had such experience with men himself.

"But why have you not spoken of it before—and to Colonel Pendleton?"

"He did not choose to tell *me*," said Yerba, with feminine dexterity. "I have preferred to keep it myself a secret till I am of age."

When Colonel Pendleton and some of the other trustees have no right to say anything, thought Paul quickly. She had evidently trusted *him*. Yet, fascinated as he had been by her audacity, he did not know whether to be pleased, or the reverse. He would have preferred to be placed on an equal footing with Josita Castro. She anticipated his thoughts by saying, with half-raised eyelids—

"What do *you* think of it?"

"It seems to be so natural and obvious an explanation of the mystery that I only wonder it was not thought of before," said Paul, with that perfect sincerity that made his sympathy so effective.

"You see"—still under her pretty eyelids, and the tender promise of a smile parting her little mouth—"I'm believing that you tell the truth when you say you don't know anything about it."

It was a desperate moment with Paul, but his sympathetic instincts, and possibly his luck, triumphed. His momentary hesitation easily simulated the caution of a conscientious man; his knit eyebrows and bright eyes, lowered in an effort of memory, did the rest. "I remember it all so indistinctly," he said, with literal truthfulness; "there was a veiled lady present, tall and dark, to whom Mayor Hammersley and the Colonel showed a singular, and it struck me as an almost superstitious, respect. I remember now, distinctly, I was impressed with the reverential way they both accompanied her to the door at the end of the

interview." He raised his eyes slightly; the young girl's red lips were parted; that illumination of the skin, which was her nearest approach to colour, had quite transfigured her face. He felt suddenly that she believed it, yet he had no sense of remorse. He half believed it himself; at least, he remembered the nobility of the mother's self-renunciation and its effect upon the two men. Why should not the daughter preserve this truthful picture of the mother's momentary exaltation? Which was the most truthful—that, or the degrading facts? "You speak of a secret," he added. "I can remember little more than that the Mayor asked me to forget, from that moment, the whole occurrence. I did not know at the time how completely I should fulfil his request. You must remember, Miss Yerba, as your Lady Superior has, that I was absurdly young at the time. I don't know but that I may have thought, in my youthful inexperience, that this sort of thing was of common occurrence. And then, I had my own future to make—and youth is brutally selfish. I was quite friendless and unknown when I left San Francisco for the mines, at the time you entered the convent as Yerba Buena."

She smiled, and made a slight impulsive gesture, as if she would have drawn nearer to him, but checked herself, still smiling, and without embarrassment. It may have been a movement of youthful *camaraderie*, and that occasional maternal rather than sisterly instinct which sometimes influences a young girl's masculine friendship, and elevates the favoured friend to the plane of the doll she has outgrown. As he turned towards her, however, she rose, shook out her yellow dress, and said with pretty petulance—

"Then you must go so soon—and this your first and last visit as my guardian?"

"No one could regret that more than I," looking at her with undefined meaning.

"Yes," she said, with a tantalising coquetry that might have suggested an underlying seriousness, "I think you *have* lost a good deal. Perhaps so have I. We might have been good friends in all these years. But that is past."

"Why? Surely, I hope, my shortcomings with Miss Yerba Buena will not be remembered by Miss Arguello?" said Paul earnestly.

"Ah! *She* may be a very different person."

"I hope not," said the young man warmly. "But *how* different?"

"Well, she may not put herself in the way of receiving such point-blank compliments as that," said the young girl demurely.

"Not from her guardian?"

"She will have no guardian then." She said this gravely, but almost at the same moment turned and sat down again, throwing her linked hands over her knee, and looked at him mischievously. "You see what you have lost, sir."

"I see," said Paul, but with all the gravity that she had dropped.

"No; but you don't see all. I had no brother—no friend. You might have been both. You might have made me what you liked. You might have educated me far better than these teachers, or, at least, given me some pride in my studies. There were so many things I wanted to know that they couldn't teach me; so many times I wanted advice from some one that I could trust. Colonel Pendleton was very good to me when he came; he always treated me like a princess even when I wore short frocks. It was his manner that first made me think he knew my family; but I never felt as if I could tell him anything, and I don't think, with all his chivalrous respect, he ever understood me. As to the others—the Mayors—well, you may judge from

Mr. Henderson. It is a wonder that I did not run away or do something desperate. Now, are you not a *little* sorry?"

Her voice, which had as many capricious changes as her manner, had been alternately coquettish, petulant, and serious, had now become playful again. But, like the rest of her sex, she was evidently more alert to her surroundings at such a moment than her companion, for before he could make any reply she said, without apparently looking, "But there is a deputation coming for you, Mr. Hathaway. You see, the case is hopeless. You never would be able to give to one what is claimed by the many."

Paul glanced down the rose-alley, and saw that the deputation in question was composed of the Mayor, Mr. Woods, a thin, delicate-looking woman—evidently Mrs. Woods—and Milly. The latter managed to reach the summer-house first, with apparently youthful alacrity, but really to exchange, in a single glance, some mysterious feminine signal with Yerba. Then she said with breathless infelicity—

"Before you two get bored with each other now, I must tell you there's a chance of you having more time. Aunty has promised to send off a note excusing you to the Reverend Mother, if she can persuade Mr. Hathaway to stay over to-night. But here they are. [To Yerba] Aunty is most anxious, and won't hear of his going."

Indeed, it seemed as if Mrs. Woods was, after a refined fashion, most concerned that a distinguished visitor like Mr. Hathaway should have to use her house as a mere accidental meeting-place with his ward, without deigning to accept her hospitality. She was reinforced by Mr. Woods, who enunciated the same idea with more masculine vigour; and by the Mayor, who expressed his conviction that a slight of this kind to Rosario would be felt in the Santa Clara valley. "After dinner, my dear Hathaway," concluded Mr. Woods, "a few of our neighbours may drop in, who would be glad

to shake you by the hand—no formal meeting, my boy—but, hang it! *they* expect it.”

Paul looked around for Yerba. There was really no reason why he shouldn't accept, although an hour ago the idea had never entered his mind. Yet, if he did, he would like the girl to know that it was for *her* sake. Unfortunately, far from exhibiting any concern in the matter, she seemed to be preoccupied with Milly, and only the charming back of her head was visible behind Mrs. Woods. He accepted, however, with a hesitation that took some of the graciousness from his yielding, and a sense that he was giving a strange importance to a trivial circumstance.

The necessity of attaching himself to his hostess, and making a more extended tour of the grounds, for a while diverted him from an uneasy consideration of his past interview. Mrs. Woods had known Yerba through the school friendship of Milly, and, as far as the religious rules of the convent would allow, had always been delighted to show her any hospitality. She was a beautiful girl—did not Mr. Hathaway think so?—and a girl of great character. It was a pity, of course, that she had never known a mother's care, and that the present routine of a boarding-school had usurped the tender influences of home. She believed, too, that the singular rotation of guardianship had left the girl practically without a counselling friend to rely upon, except perhaps Colonel Pendleton; and while she, Mrs. Woods, did not for a moment doubt that the Colonel might be a good friend and a pleasant companion of *men*, really he, Mr. Hathaway, must admit that, with his reputation and habits, he was hardly a fit associate for a young lady. Indeed, Mr. Woods would never have allowed Milly to invite Yerba here if Colonel Pendleton was to have been her escort. Of course, the poor girl could not choose her own guardian, but Mr. Woods said *he* had a right to

choose who should be his niece's company. Perhaps Mr. Woods was prejudiced—most men were—yet surely Mr. Hathaway, although a loyal friend of Colonel Pendleton's, must admit that when it was an open scandal that the Colonel had fought a duel about a notoriously common woman, and even blasphemously defended her before a party of gentlemen, it was high time, as Mr. Woods said, that he should be remanded to their company exclusively. No ; Mrs. Woods could not admit that this was owing to the injustice of her own sex ! Men are really the ones who make the fuss over those things, just as they, as Mr. Hathaway well knew, made the laws ! No ; it was a great pity, as she and her husband had just agreed, that Mr. Hathaway, of all the guardians, could not have been always the help and counsellor—in fact, the elder brother—of poor Yerba ! Paul was conscious that he winced slightly, consistently and conscientiously, at the recollection of certain passages of his youth ; inconsistently and meanly, at this suggestion of a joint relationship with Yerba's mother.

"I think, too," continued Mrs. Woods, "she has worried foolishly about this ridiculous mystery of her parentage—as if it could make the slightest difference to a girl with a quarter of a million, or as if that didn't show quite conclusively that she *was* somebody !"

"Certainly," said Paul quickly, with a relief that he nevertheless felt was ridiculous.

"And, of course, I dare say it will all come out when she is of age. I suppose you know if any of the family are still living ?"

"I really do not."

"I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Woods, with a smile, "I forgot it's a profound secret until then. But here we are at the house ; I see the girls have walked over to our neighbours'. Perhaps you would like to have a few

moments to yourself before you dress for dinner, and your portmanteau, which has been sent for, comes from your hotel. You must be tired of seeing so many people."

Paul was glad to accept any excuse for being alone, and, thanking his hostess, followed a servant to his room—a low-ceilinged but luxuriously furnished apartment on the first floor. Here he threw himself on a cushioned lounge that filled the angle of the deep embrasure—the thickness of the old adobe walls—that formed a part of the wooden-latticed window. A Cape jessamine climbing beside it filled the room with its subtle, intoxicating perfume. It was so strong, and he felt himself so irresistibly overpowered and impelled towards a merely idle reverie, that, in order to think more clearly and shut out some strange and unreasoning enthrallment of his senses, he rose and sharply closed the window. Then he sat down and reflected.

What was he doing here? and what was the meaning of all this? He had come simply to fulfil a duty to his past, and please a helpless and misunderstood old acquaintance. He had performed that duty. But he had incidentally learned a certain fact that might be important to this friend, and clearly his duty was simply to go back and report it. He would gain nothing more in the way of corroboration of it by staying now, if further corroboration were required. Colonel Pendleton had already been uselessly and absurdly perplexed about the possible discovery of the girl's parentage, and its effect upon her fortunes and herself. She had just settled that of her own accord, and, without committing herself or others, had suggested a really sensible plan by which all trouble would be avoided in future. That was the common-sense way of looking at it. He would lay the plan before the Colonel, have him judge of its expediency and its ethics—and even the question whether she already knew the real truth, or was self-de-

ceived. That done, he would return to his own affairs in Sacramento. There was nothing difficult in this, or that need worry him, only he could have done it just as well an hour ago.

He opened the window again. The scent of the jessamine came in as before, but mingled with the cooler breath of the roses. There was nothing intoxicating or unreal in it now; rather it seemed a gentle aromatic stimulant—of thought. Long shadows of unseen poplars beyond barred the garden lanes and alleys with bands of black and yellow. A slanting pencil of sunshine through the trees was for a moment focussed on a bed of waxen callas before a hedge of ceanothus, and struck into dazzling relief the cold white chalices of the flowers and the vivid shining green of their background. Presently it slid beyond to a tiny fountain, before invisible, and wrought a blinding miracle out of its flashing and leaping spray. Yet even as he gazed the fountain seemed to vanish slowly, the sunbeam slipped on, and beyond it moved the shimmer of white and yellow dresses. It was Yerba and Milly returning to the house. Well, he would not interrupt his reflections by idly watching them; he would probably see a great deal of Yerba that evening, and by that time he would have come to some conclusion in regard to her.

But he had not taken into consideration her voice, which, always musical in its Southern intonation and quite audible in the quiet garden, struck him now as being full of joyous sweetness. Well, she was certainly very happy—or very thoughtless. She was actually romping with Milly, and was now evidently being chased down the rose-alley by that volatile young woman. Then these swift Camillas apparently neared the house, there was the rapid rustle of skirts, the skurrying of little feet on the verandah, a stumble, a mouse-like shriek from Milly, and *her* voice, exhausted,

dying, happy, broken with half-hushed laughter, rose to him on the breath of the jessamine and rose.

Surely she *was* a child, and, if a child, how he had misjudged her! What if all that he had believed was mature deliberation was only the innocent imaginings of a romantic girl, all that he had taken seriously only a schoolgirl's foolish dream! Instead of combating it, instead of reasoning with her, instead of trying to interest her in other things, he had even helped on her illusions. He had treated her as if the taint of her mother's worldliness and knowledge of evil was in her pure young flesh. He had recognised her as the daughter of an adventuress, and not as his ward, appealing to his chivalry through her very ignorance—it might be her very childish vanity. He had brought to a question of tender and pathetic interest only his selfish opinion of the world and the weaknesses of mankind. The blood came to his cheeks—with all his experienced self-control, he had not lost the youthful trick of blushing—and he turned away from the window as if it had breathed a reproach.

But ought he have even contented himself with destroying her illusions—ought he not have gone further and told her the whole truth? Ought he not first have won her confidence—he remembered bitterly, now, how she had intimated that she had no one to confide in—and, after revealing her mother's history, have still pledged himself to keep the secret from all others, and assisted her in her plan? It would not have altered the state of affairs, except so far as she was concerned: they could have combined together, his ready wit would have helped him, and his sympathy would have sustained her; but——

How and in what way could he have told her? Leaving out the delicate and difficult periphrase by which her mother's shame would have to be explained to an innocent schoolgirl—what right could he have assumed to tell it?

As the guardian who had never counselled or protected her? As an acquaintance of hardly an hour ago? Who would have such a right? A lover—on whose lips it would only seem a tacit appeal to her gratitude or her fears, and whom no sensitive girl could accept thereafter? No. A husband? Yes! He remembered with a sudden start what Pendleton had said to him. Good heavens! Had Pendleton that idea in his mind? And yet—it seemed the only solution.

A knock at his door was followed by the appearance of Mr. Woods. Mr. Hathaway's portmanteau had come, and Mrs. Woods had sent a message, saying that in view of the limited time that Mr. Hathaway would have with his ward, Mrs. Woods would forego her right to keep him at her side at dinner, and yield her place to Yerba. Paul thanked him with a grave inward smile. What if he made his dramatic disclosure to her confidentially over the soup and fish? Yet, in his constantly recurring conviction of the girl's independence, he made no doubt she would have met his brutality with unflinching pride and self-possession. He began to dress slowly, at times almost forgetting himself in a new kind of pleasant apathy, which he attributed to the odour of the flowers, and the softer hush of twilight that had come on with the dying away of the trade winds, and the restful spice of the bay-trees near his window. He presently found himself not so much thinking of Yerba as *seeing* her. A picture of her in the summer-house caressing her cheek with the roses seemed to stand out from the shadows of the blank wall opposite him. When he passed into the dressing-room beyond, it was not his own face he saw in the glass, but hers. It was with a start, as if he had heard *her* voice, that he found upon his dressing-table a small vase containing a flower for his coat, with the pencilled words on a card in a schoolgirl's hand "From Yerba, with thanks for staying."

It must have been placed there by a servant while he was musing at the window.

Half a dozen people were already in the drawing-room when Paul descended. It appeared that Mr. Woods had invited certain of his neighbours—among them a Judge Baker and his wife, and Don Cæsar Briones, of the adjacent Rancho of Los Pajaros, and his sister, the Doña Anna. Milly and Yerba had not yet appeared. Don Cæsar, a young man of a toreador build, roundly bland in face and murky in eye, seemed to notice their absence, and kept his glances towards the door, while Paul engaged in conversation with Doña Anna—if that word could convey an impression of a conventionality which that good-humoured young lady converted into an animated flirtation at the second sentence with a single glance and two shakes of her fan. And then Milly fluttered in—a vision of schoolgirl freshness and white tulle, and a moment later—with a pause of expectation—a tall, graceful figure, that at first Paul scarcely recognised.

It is a popular conceit of our sex that we are superior to any effect of feminine adornment, and that a pretty girl is equally pretty in the simplest frock. Yet there was not a man in the room who did not believe that Yerba in her present attire was not only far prettier than before, but that she indicated a new and more delicate form of beauty. It was not the mere revelation of contour and colour of an ordinary *décolleté* dress, it was a perfect presentment of pure symmetry and carriage. In this black grenadine dress, trimmed with jet, not only was the delicate satin sheen of her skin made clearer by contrast, but she looked every inch her full height, with an ideal exaltation of breeding and culture. She wore no jewellery except a small necklace of pearls—so small it might have been a child's—that fitted her slender throat so tightly that it could scarcely be told

from the flesh that it clasped. Paul did not know that it was the gift of the mother to the child that she had forsworn only a few weeks before she parted from her for ever; but he had a vague feeling that, in that sable dress that seemed like mourning, she walked at the funeral of her mother's past. A few white flowers in her corsage, the companions of the solitary one in his button-hole, were the only relief.

Their eyes met for a single moment, the look of admiration in Paul's being answered by the naïve consciousness in Yerba's of a woman looking her best; but the next moment she appeared preoccupied with the others, and the eager advances of Don Cæsar.

"Your brother seems to admire Miss Yerba," said Paul.

"Ah, ye—es," returned Doña Anna. "And you?"

"Oh!" said Paul gaily. "I? I am her guardian—with me it is simple egotism, you know."

"Ah!" returned the arch Doña Anna, "you are then already *so* certain of her? Good! I shall warn him."

A precaution that did seem necessary; as later, when Paul, at a signal from his hostess, offered his arm to Yerba, the young Spaniard regarded him with a look of startled curiosity.

"I thank you for selecting me to wear your colours," said Paul, with a glance at the flowers in her corsage, as they sat at table, "and I think I deserve them, since, but for you, I should be on my way to San Francisco at this moment. Shall I have an opportunity of talking to you a few moments later in the evening?" he added, in a lower tone.

"Why not now?" returned Yerba mischievously. "We are set here expressly for that purpose?"

"Surely not to talk of our own business—I should say, of our *family* affairs," said Paul, looking at her with equal playfulness; "though I believe your friend Don Cæsar, opposite, would be more pleased if he were sure that was all we did."

"And you think his sister would share in that pleasure," retorted Yerba. "I warn you, Mr. Hathaway, that you have been quite justifying the Reverend Mother's doubts about your venerable pretensions. Everybody is staring at you now."

Paul looked up mechanically. It was true. Whether from some occult sympathy, from a human tendency to admire obvious fitness and symmetry, or the innocent love with which the world regards youthful lovers, they were all observing Yerba and himself with undisguised attention. A good talker, he quickly led the conversation to other topics. It was then that he discovered that Yerba was not only accomplished, but that this convent-bred girl had acquired a singular breadth of knowledge apart from the ordinary routine of the school curriculum. She spoke and thought with independent perceptions and clearness, yet without the tactlessness and masculine abruptness that is apt to detract from feminine originality of reflection. By some tacit understanding that had the charm of mutual confidence they both exerted themselves to please the company rather than each other, and Paul, in the interchange of sallies with Doña Anna, had a certain pleasure in hearing Yerba converse in Spanish with Don Cæsar. But in a few moments he observed, with some uneasiness, that they were talking of the old Spanish occupation, and presently of the old Spanish families. Would she prematurely expose an ignorance that might be hereafter remembered against her, or invite some dreadful genealogical reminiscence that would destroy her hopes and raze her Spanish castles? Or was she simply collecting information? He admired the dexterity with which, without committing herself, she made Don Cæsar openly and even confidentially communicative. And yet he was on thorns: at times it seemed as if he himself were playing a part in this imposture of Yerba's. He was aware

that his wandering attention was noticed by the quick-witted Doña Anna, when he regained his self-possession by what appeared to be a happy diversion. It was the voice of Mrs. Judge Baker calling across the table to Yerba. By one of the peculiar accidents of general conversation, it was the one apparently trivial remark that in a pause challenged the ears of all.

"We were admiring your necklace, Miss Yerba."

Every eye was turned upon the slender throat of the handsome girl. The excuse was so natural.

Yerba put her hand to her neck with a smile. "You are joking, Mrs. Baker. I know it is ridiculously small; but it is a child's necklace, and I wear it because it was a gift from my mother."

Paul's heart sank again with consternation. It was the first time that he had heard the girl distinctly connect herself with her actual mother, and for an instant he felt as startled as if the forgotten Outcast herself had returned and taken a seat at the board.

"I told you it couldn't be so?" said Mrs. Baker, turning to her husband.

Everybody naturally looked inquiringly upon the couple, and Mrs. Baker explained with a smile: "Bob thinks he's seen it before; men are so obstinate."

"Pardon me, Miss Yerba," said the Judge blandly; "would you mind showing it to me, if it is not too much trouble?"

"Not at all," said Yerba, smiling, and detaching the circlet from her neck. "I'm afraid you'll find it rather old-fashioned."

"That's just what I hope to find it," said Judge Baker, with a triumphant glance at his wife. "It was eight years ago when I saw it in Tucker's jewellery shop. I wanted to buy it for my little Minnie, but as the price was steep I hesitated, and when I did make up my mind he had dis-

posed of it to another customer. Yes," he added, examining the necklace that Yerba had handed to him, "I am certain it is the same; it was unique, like this. Odd, isn't it?"

Everybody said it *was* odd, and looked upon the occurrence with that unreasoning satisfaction with which average humanity receives the most trivial and unmeaning coincidences. It was left to Don Cæsar to give it a gallant application.

"I have not-a the pleasure of knowing-a the Miss Minnie, but the jewellery, when she arrives to the throat-a of Miss Yerba, she has not lost the value—the beauty—the charm."

"No," said Woods cheerily. "The fact is, Baker, you were too slow. Miss Yerba's folks gobbled up the necklace while you were thinking. You were a new-comer. Old 'forty-niners' did not hesitate over a thing they wanted."

"You never knew who was your successful rival, eh?" said Doña Anna, turning to Judge Baker, with a curious glance at Paul's pale face in passing.

"No," said Baker, "but——" he stopped with a hesitating laugh and some little confusion. "No, I've mixed it up with something else. It's so long ago. I never knew, or if I did I've forgotten. But the necklace I remember." He handed it back to Yerba with a bow, and the incident ended.

Paul had not looked at Yerba during this conversation, an unreasoning instinct that he might confuse her, an equally unreasoning dread that he might see her confused by others, possessing him. And when he did glance at her calm, untroubled face, that seemed only a little surprised at his own singular coldness, he was by no means relieved. He was only convinced of one thing. In the last five minutes he had settled upon the irrevocable determination that his present relations with the girl could exist no longer. He must either tell her everything, or see her no more. There was no middle course. She was on the brink of an ex-

posure at any moment, either through her ignorance or her unhappy pretension. In his intolerable position he was equally unable to contemplate her peril, accept her defence, or himself defend her.

As if, with some feminine instinct, she had attributed his silence to some jealousy of Don Cæsar's attentions, she more than once turned from the Spaniard to Paul with an assuring smile. In his anxiety he half accepted the rather humiliating suggestion, and managed to say to her in a lower tone—

"On this last visit of your American guardian, one would think, you need not already anticipate your Spanish relations."

He was thrilled with the mischievous yet faintly tender pleasure that sparkled in her eyes as she said—

"You forget it is my American guardian's *first* visit, as well as his last."

"And as your guardian," he went on, with half-veiled seriousness, "I protest against your allowing your treasures, the property of the Trust," he gazed directly into her beautiful eyes, "being handled and commented upon by everybody."

When the ladies had left the table, he was, for a moment, relieved. But only for a moment. Judge Baker drew his chair beside Paul's, and taking his cigar from his lips, said with a perfunctory laugh—

"I say, Hathaway, I pulled up just in time to save myself from making an awful speech just now to your ward."

Paul looked at him with cold curiosity.

"Yes. Gad! Do you know *who* was my rival in that necklace transaction?"

"No," said Paul, with frigid carelessness.

"Why, Kate Howard! Fact, sir. She bought it right under my nose—and overbid me, too."

Paul did not lose his self-possession. Thanks to the

fact that Yerba was not present, and that Don Cæsar, who had overheard the speech, moved forward with a suggestive and unpleasant smile, his agitation congealed into a coldly placid fury.

"And I suppose," he returned, with perfect calmness, "that, after the usual habit of this class of women, the necklace very soon found its way back, through the pawnbroker, to the jeweller again. It's a common fate."

"Yes, of course," said Judge Baker cheerfully. "You're quite right. That's undoubtedly the solution of it. But," with a laugh, "I had a narrow escape from saying something—eh?"

"A very narrow escape from an apparently gratuitous insult," said Paul gravely, but fixing his eyes, now more luminous than ever with anger, not on the speaker, but on the face of Don Cæsar, who was standing at his side. "You were about to say——"

"Eh—oh—ah! this Kate Howard? So! I have heard of her—yees! And Miss Yerba—ah—she is of my country—I think. Yes—we shall claim her—of a truth—yes."

"Your countrymen, I believe, are in the habit of making claims that are more often founded on profit than verity," said Paul, with smileless and insulting deliberation. He knew perfectly what he was saying, and the result he expected. Only twenty-four hours before he had smiled at Pendleton's idea of averting scandal and discovery by fighting, yet he was endeavouring to pick a quarrel with a man, merely on suspicion, for the same purpose, and he saw nothing strange in it. A vague idea, too, that this would irrevocably confirm him in opposition to Yerba's illusions probably determined him.

But Don Cæsar, albeit smiling lividly, did not seem inclined to pick up the gauntlet, and Woods interfered hastily. "Don Cæsar means that your ward has some idea herself

that she is of Spanish origin—at least, Milly says so. But of course, as one of the oldest trustees, *you* know the facts.”

In another moment Paul would have committed himself. “I think we’ll leave Miss Yerba out of the question,” he said coldly. “My remark was a general one, though, of course, I am responsible for any personal application of it.”

“Spoken like a politician, Hathaway,” said Judge Baker, with an effusive enthusiasm which he hoped would atone for the alarming results of his infelicitous speech. “That’s right, gentlemen! You can’t get the facts from him before he is ready to give them. Keep your secret, Mr. Hathaway; the Court is with you.”

Nevertheless, as they passed out of the room to join the ladies, the Mayor lingered a little behind with Woods. “It’s easy to see the influence of that Pendleton on our young friend,” he said significantly. “Somebody ought to tell him that it’s played out down here—as Pendleton is. It’s quite enough to ruin his career.”

Paul was too observant not to notice this, but it brought him no sense of remorse; and his youthful belief in himself and his power kept him from concern. He felt as if he had done something, if only to show Don Cæsar that the girl’s weakness or ignorance could not be traded upon with impunity. But he was still undecided as to the course he should pursue. But he should determine that to-night. At present there seemed no chance of talking to her alone—she was unconcernedly conversing with Milly and Mrs. Woods, and already the visitors who had been invited to this hurried *levée* in his honour were arriving. In view of his late indiscretion, he nervously exerted his fullest powers, and in a very few minutes was surrounded by a breathless and admiring group of worshippers. A ludicrous resemblance to the scene in the Golden Gate Hotel passed through his mind; he involuntarily turned his eyes to seek Yerba in

the half fear, half expectation of meeting her mischievous smile. Their glances met; to his surprise hers was smileless, and instantly withdrawn, but not until he had been thrilled by an unconscious prepossession in its luminous depths that he scarcely dared to dwell upon. What mattered now his passage with Don Cæsar or the plaudits of his friends? *She* was proud of him!

Yet after that glance she was shy, preoccupying herself with Milly, or even listening sweetly to Judge Baker's somewhat practical and unromantic reminiscences of the deprivations and the hardships of Californian early days, as if to condone his past infelicity. She was pleasantly unaffected with Don Cæsar, although she managed to draw Doña Anna into the conversation; she was unconventional, Paul fancied, to all but himself. Once or twice, when he had artfully drawn her towards the open French windows that led to the moonlit garden and shadowed verandah, she had managed to link Milly's arm in her own, and he was confident that a suggestion to stroll with him in the open air would be followed by her invitation to Milly to accompany them. Disappointed and mortified as he was, he found some solace in her manner, which he still believed suggested the hope that she might be made accessible to his persuasions. Persuasions to what? He did not know.

The last guest had departed; he lingered on the verandah with a cigar, begging his host and hostess not to trouble themselves to keep him company. Milly and Yerba had retired to the former's boudoir, but, as they had not yet formally bade him good-night, there was a chance of their returning. He still stayed on in this hope for half-an-hour, and then, accepting Yerba's continued absence as a tacit refusal of his request, he turned abruptly away. But as he glanced around the garden before re-entering the house, he was struck by a singular circumstance—a white patch,

like a forgotten shawl, which he had observed on the distant ceanothus hedge, and which had at first thrilled him with expectation, had certainly *changed its position*. Before, it seemed to be near the summer-house; now it was, undoubtedly, farther away. Could they, or *she* alone, have slipped from the house and be awaiting him there? With a muttered exclamation at his stupidity, he stepped hastily from the verandah and walked towards it. But he had scarcely proceeded a dozen yards before it disappeared. He reached the summer-house—it was empty; he followed the line of hedge—no one was there. It could not have been her, or she would have waited—unless he were the victim of a practical joke. He turned impatiently back to the house, re-entered the drawing-room by the French window, and was crossing the half-lit apartment, when he heard a slight rustle in the shadow of the window. He looked around quickly, and saw that it was Yerba, in a white loose gown, for which she had already exchanged her black evening dress, leaning back composedly on the sofa, her hands clasped behind her shapely head.

“I am waiting for Milly,” she said, with a faint smile on her lips. He fancied, in the moonlight that streamed upon her, that her beautiful face was pale. “She has gone to the other wing to see one of the servants who is ill. We thought you were on the verandah smoking and I should have company, until I saw you start off, and rush up and down the hedge like mad.”

Paul felt that he was losing his self-possession, and becoming nervous in her presence.

“I thought it was *you*,” he stammered.

“Me! Out in the garden at this hour alone, and in the broad moonlight? What are you thinking of, Mr. Hathaway? Do you know anything of convent rules, or is that your idea of your ward’s education?”

He fancied that, though she smiled faintly, her voice was as tremulous as his own.

"I want to speak with you," he said, with awkward directness. "I even thought of asking you to stroll with me in the garden."

"Why not talk here?" she returned, changing her position, pointing to the other end of the sofa, and drawing the whole overflow of her skirt to one side. "It is not so very late, and Milly will return in a few moments."

Her face was in shadow now, but there was a glow-worm light in her beautiful eyes that seemed faintly to illuminate her whole face. He sank down on the sofa at her side, no longer the brilliant and ambitious politician, but, it seemed to him, as hopelessly a dreaming, inexperienced boy as when he had given her the name that now was all he could think of, and the only word that rose to his feverish lips.

"Yerba !"

"I like to hear you say it," she said quickly, as if to gloss over his first omission of her formal prefix, and leaning a little forward, with her eyes on his. "One would think you had created it. You almost make me regret to lose it."

He stopped ! He felt that the last sentence had saved him. "It is of that I want to speak," he broke out suddenly and almost rudely. "Are you satisfied that it means nothing, and can mean nothing, to you ? Does it awaken no memory in your mind—recall nothing you care to know ? Think ! I beg you, I implore you to be frank with me !"

She looked at him with surprise.

"I have told you already that my present name must be some absurd blunder, or some intentional concealment. But why do you want to know *now* ?" she continued, adding her faint smile to the emphasis.

"To help you!" he said eagerly. "For that alone! To do all I can to assist you, if you really believe, and want to believe, that you have another. To ask you to confide in me; to tell me all you have been told, all that you know, think you know, or *want* to know about your relationship to the Arguellos—or to any one! And then to devote myself entirely to proving what you shall say is your desire. You see I am frank with you, Yerba! I only ask you to be as frank with me: to let me know your doubts, that I may counsel you; your fears, that I may give you courage."

"Is that all that you came here to tell me?" she asked quietly.

"No, Yerba," he said eagerly, taking her unresisting but indifferent hand, "not all; but all that I must say, all that I have the right to say, all that you, Yerba, would permit me to tell you *now*. But let me hope that the day is not far distant when I can tell you *all*, when you will understand that this silence has been the hardest sacrifice of the man who now speaks to you."

"And yet not unworthy of a rising politician," she added, quickly withdrawing her hand. "I agree," she went on, looking towards the door, yet without appearing to avoid his eager eyes; "and when I have settled upon 'a local habitation and a name' we shall renew this interesting conversation. Until then, as my fourth official guardian used to say—he was a lawyer, Mr. Hathaway, like yourself—when he was winding up his conjectures on the subject—all that has passed is to be considered 'without prejudice'!"

"But, Yerba——" began Paul bitterly.

She slightly raised her hand as if to check him with a warning gesture. "Yes, dear," she said suddenly, lifting her musical voice, with a mischievous side-glance at Paul, as if to indicate her conception of the irony of a possible

application, "this way! Here we are waiting for you!" Her listening ear had detected Milly's step in the passage, and in another moment that cheerful young woman discreetly stopped on the threshold of the room, with every expression of apologetic indiscretion in her face.

"We have finished our talk, and Mr. Hathaway has been so concerned about my having no real name that he has been promising me everything, but his own, for a suitable one. Haven't you, Mr. Hathaway?" She rose slowly, and, going over to Milly, put her arm around her waist and stood for one instant gazing at him between the curtains of the doorway. "Good-night. My very proper chaperon is dreadfully shocked at this midnight interview, and is taking me away. Only think of it, Milly: he actually proposed to me to walk in the garden with him! Good-night, or, as my ancestors—don't forget, *my ancestors*—used to say, '*Buena noche—hasta mañana!*'" She lingered over the Spanish syllables with an imitation of Doña Anna's lisp, and with another smile, but more faint and more ghost-like than before, vanished with her companion.

At eight o'clock the next morning Paul was standing beside his portmanteau on the verandah.

"But this is a sudden resolution of yours, Hathaway," said Mr. Woods. "Can you not possibly wait for the next train? The girls will be down then, and you can breakfast comfortably."

"I have much to do—more than I imagined—in San Francisco before I return," said Paul quickly. "You must make my excuses to them and to your wife."

"I hope," said Woods, with an uneasy laugh, "you have had no more words with Don Cæsar, or he with you?"

"No," said Paul, with a reassuring smile; "nothing more, I assure you."

"For you know you're a devilish quick fellow, Hathaway,"

continued Woods; "quite as quick as your friend Pendleton. And, by the way, Baker is awfully cut up about that absurd speech of his, you know. Came to me last night and wondered if anybody could think it was intentional. I told him it was d—d stupid, that was all. I guess his wife had been at him. Ha! ha! You see, he remembers the old times, when everybody talked of these things, and that woman Howard was quite a character. I'm told she went off to the States years ago."

"Possibly," said Paul carelessly. After a pause, as the carriage drove up to the door, he turned to his host. "By the way, Woods, have you a ghost here?"

"The house is old enough for one. But no. Why?"

"I'll swear I saw a figure moving yonder in the shrubbery late last evening; and when I came up to it, it most unaccountably disappeared."

"One of Don Cæsar's servants, I dare say. There is one of them, an Indian, prowling about here, I've been told, at all hours. I'll put a stop to it. Well, you must go, then? Dreadfully sorry you couldn't stop longer! Good-bye!"

CHAPTER IV.

It was two months later that Mr. Tony Shear, of Marysville, but lately confidential clerk to the Hon. Paul Hathaway, entered his employer's chambers in Sacramento and handed the latter a letter.

"I only got back from San Francisco this morning; but Mr. Slate said I was to give you that, and if it satisfied you, and was what you wanted, you would send it back to him."

Paul took the envelope and opened it. It contained a printer's proof-slip, which he hurriedly glanced over. It read as follows:—

“Those of our readers who are familiar with the early history of San Francisco will be interested to know that an eccentric and irregular trusteeship, vested for the last eight years in the Mayor of San Francisco and two of our oldest citizens, was terminated yesterday by the majority of a beautiful and accomplished young lady, a pupil of the Convent of Santa Clara. Very few, except the original trustees, were cognisant of the fact that the administration of the trustees has been a recognised function of the successive Mayors of San Francisco during this period; and the mystery surrounding it has been only lately divulged. It offers a touching and romantic instance of a survival of the old patriarchal duties of the former *Alcaldes* and the simplicity of pioneer days. It seems that, in the unsettled conditions of the Mexican land-titles that followed the American occupation, the consumptive widow of a scion of one of the oldest Californian families entrusted her property and the custody of her infant daughter virtually to the city of San Francisco, as represented by the trustees specified, until the girl should become of age. Within a year the invalid mother died. With what loyalty, sagacity, and prudence these gentlemen fulfilled their trust may be gathered from the fact that the property left in their charge has not only been secured and protected, but increased a hundredfold in value; and that the young lady who yesterday attained her majority is not only one of the richest landed heiresses on the Pacific Slope, but one of the most accomplished and thoroughly educated of her sex. It is now no secret that this favoured child of Chrysopolis is the Doña Maria Concepcion de Arguello de la Yerba Buena, so called from her ancestral property on the island, now owned by the Federal Government. But it is an affecting and poetic tribute to the parent of her adoption that she has preferred to pass under the old, quaintly typical

name of the city, and has been known to her friends simply as 'Miss Yerba Buena.' It is a no less pleasant and suggestive circumstance that our 'youngest Senator,' the Honourable Paul Hathaway, formerly private secretary to Mayor Hammersley, is one of the original unofficial trustees; while the chivalry of the older days is perpetuated in the person of Colonel Harry Pendleton, the remaining trustee."

As soon as he had finished, Paul took a pencil and crossed out the last six lines; but instead of laying the proof aside, or returning it to the waiting secretary, he remained with it in his hand, his silent, set face turned towards the window. Whether the merely human secretary was tired of waiting, or the devoted partisan saw something on his young chief's face that disturbed him, he turned to Paul with that exaggerated respect which his functions as secretary had grafted upon his affection for his old associate and said—"I hope nothing's wrong, sir. Not another of those scurrilous attacks on you for putting that bill through to relieve Colonel Pendleton? Yet it was a risky thing for you, sir."

Paul started, recovered himself as if from some remote abstraction, and with a smile said, "No—nothing. Quite the reverse. Write to Mr. Slate, thank him, and say that it will do very well—with the exception of the lines I have marked out. Then bring me the letter, and I will add this enclosure. Did you call on Colonel Pendleton?"

"Yes, sir. He was at Santa Clara, and had not yet returned—at least, that's what that dandy nigger of his told me. The airs and graces that that creature puts on since the Colonel's affairs have been straightened out is a little too much for a white man to stand. Why, sir! d—d if he didn't want to patronise *you*, and allowed to me that

'de Kernel' had a 'fah ideah' of you, 'and thought you a promisin' young man.' The fact is, sir, the Party is making a big mistake trying to give votes to that kind of cattle—it would only be giving two votes to the other side, for, slave or free, they're the chattels of their old masters. And as to the masters' gratitude for what you've done affecting a single vote of their Party—you're mistaken."

"Colonel Pendleton belongs to no Party," said Paul curtly; "but if his old constituents ever try to get into power again, they've lost their only independent martyr."

He presently became abstracted again, and Shear produced from his overcoat pocket a series of official-looking documents.

"I've brought the reports, sir."

"Eh?" said Paul absently.

The secretary stared. "The reports of the San Francisco Chief of Police that you asked me to get." His employer was certainly very forgetful to-day.

"Oh yes; thank you. You can lay them on my desk. I'll look them over in Committee. You can go now, and if any one calls to see me, say I am busy."

The secretary disappeared in the adjoining room, and Paul leaned back in his chair, thinking. He had at last effected the work he had resolved upon when he left Rosario two months ago; the article he had just read, and which would appear as an editorial in the San Francisco paper the day after to-morrow, was the culmination of quietly persistent labour, inquiry, and deduction, and would be accepted hereafter as authentic history, which, if not thoroughly established, at least could not be gainsaid. Immediately on arriving at San Francisco, he had hastened to Pendleton's bedside and laid the facts and his plan before him. To his mingled astonishment and chagrin, the Colonel had objected vehemently to this "saddling of

anybody's offspring on a gentleman who couldn't defend himself," and even Paul's explanation that the putative father was a myth scarcely appeased him. But Paul's timely demonstration, by relating the scene he had witnessed of Judge Baker's infelicitous memory, that the secret was likely to be revealed at any moment, and that if the girl continued to cling to her theory, as he feared she would, even to the parting with her fortune, they would be forced to accept it, or be placed in the hideous position of publishing her disgrace, at last convinced him. On the other hand, there was less danger of her *positive* imposition being discovered than of the *vague and impositive* truth. The real danger lay in the present uncertainty and mystery, which courted surmise and invited discovery. Paul himself was willing to take all the responsibility, and at last extracted from the Colonel a promise of passive assent. The only revelation he feared was from the interference of the mother, but Pendleton was strong in the belief that she had not only utterly abandoned the girl to the care of her guardians, but that she would never rescind her resolution to disclaim her relationship; that she had gone into self-exile for that purpose; and that if she *had* changed her mind he would be the first to know of it. On this they had parted. Meantime, Paul had not forgotten another resolution he had formed on his first visit to the Colonel, and had actually succeeded in getting Legislative relief for the Golden Gate Bank, and restoring to the Colonel some of his private property that had been in the hands of a receiver.

This had been the background of Paul's meditation, which only threw into stronger relief the face and figure that moved before him as persistently as it had once before in the twilight of his room at Rosario. There were times when her moonlit face, with its faint strange smile, stood out before him as it had stood out of the shadows of the

half-darkened drawing-room that night ; as he had seen it—he believed for the last time—framed for an instant in the parted curtains of the doorway, when she bade him “Good-night.” For he had never visited her since, and on the attainment of her majority had delegated his passing functions to Pendleton, whom he had induced to accompany the Mayor to Santa Clara for the final and formal ceremony. For the present she need not know how much she had been indebted to him for the accomplishment of her wishes.

With a sigh he at last recalled himself to his duty, and drawing the pile of reports which Shear had handed him, he began to examine them. These, again, bore reference to his silent, unobtrusive inquiries. In his function as chairman of committee he had taken advantage of a kind of advanced moral legislation then in vogue, and particularly in reference to a certain social reform, to examine statistics, authorities, and witnesses, and in this indirect but exhaustive manner had satisfied himself that the woman “Kate Howard,” alias “Beverley,” alias “Durfrey,” had long passed beyond the ken of local police supervision, and that in the record there was no trace or indication of her child. He was going over those infelix records of early transgressions with the eye of trained experience, making notes from time to time for his official use, and yet always watchful of his secret quest, when suddenly he stopped with a quickened pulse. In the record of an affray at a gambling-house, one of the parties had sought refuge in the room of “Kate Howard,” who was represented before the magistrate by *her protector*, *Juan de Arguello*. The date given was contemporary with the beginning of the Trust, but that proved nothing. But the name—had it any significance, or was it a grim coincidence, that spoke even more terribly and hopelessly of the woman’s promiscuous frailty? He again attacked the entire report, but there

was no other record of her name. Even that would have passed any eye less eager and watchful than his own.

He laid the reports aside, and took up the proof-slip again. Was there any man living but himself and Pendleton who would connect these two statements? That her relations with this Arguello were brief and not generally known was evident from Pendleton's ignorance of the fact. But he must see him again, and at once. Perhaps he might have acquired some information from Yerba; the young girl might have given to his age that confidence she had withheld from the younger man; indeed, he remembered with a flush it was partly in that hope that he had induced the Colonel to go to Santa Clara. He put the proof-slip in his pocket and stepped to the door of the next room.

"You need not write that letter to Slate, Tony. I will see him myself. I am going to San Francisco to-night."

"And do you want anything copied from the reports, sir?"

Paul quickly swept them from the table into his drawer, and locked it. "Not now, thank you. I'll finish my notes later."

The next morning Paul was in San Francisco, and had again crossed the portals of the Golden Gate Hotel. He had been already told that the doom of that palatial edifice was sealed by the laying of the corner-stone of a new erection in the next square that should utterly eclipse it; he even fancied that it had already lost its freshness, and its meretricious glitter had been tarnished. But when he had ordered his breakfast he made his way to the public parlour, happily deserted at that early hour. It was here that he had first seen her. She was standing there, by that mirror, when their eyes first met in a sudden instinctive sympathy. She herself had remembered and confessed it. He recalled the pleased yet conscious girlish superiority with which she had received the adulation of her friends; his memory of her

was broad enough now even to identify Milly, as it re-peopled the vacant and silent room.

An hour later he was making his way to Colonel Pendleton's lodgings, and half expecting to find the St. Charles Hotel itself transformed by the eager spirit of improvement. But it was still there in all its barbaric and provincial incongruity. Public opinion had evidently recognised that nothing save the absolute razing of its warped and flimsy walls could effect a change, and waited for it to collapse suddenly like the house of cards it resembled. Paul wondered for a moment if it were not ominous of its lodgers' hopeless inability to accept changed conditions, and it was with a feeling of doubt that he even now ascended the creaking staircase. But it was instantly dissipated on the threshold of the Colonel's sitting-room by the appearance of George and his reception of his master's guest.

The grizzled negro was arrayed in a surprisingly new suit of blue cloth with a portentous white waistcoat and an enormous crumpled white cravat, that gave him the appearance of suffering from a glandular swelling. His manner had, it seemed to Paul, advanced in exaggeration with his clothes. Dusting a chair and offering it to the visitor, he remained gracefully posed with his hand on the back of another.

"Yo' finds us heah yet, Marse Hathaway," he began, elegantly toying with an enormous silver watch-chain, "fo' de Kernel he don' bin find contagious apartments dat at all approximate, and he don' build, for his mind's not dat settled dat he ain't goin' to trabbel. De place is low down, sah, and de folks is low down, and dah's a heap o' white trash dat has congested under de roof ob de hotel since we came. But we uses it temper'ly, sah, fo' de present, and in a dissolatory fashion."

It struck Paul that the contiguity of a certain barber's shop and its dangerous reminiscences had something to do

with George's lofty depreciation of his surroundings, and he could not help saying—

"Then you don't find it necessary to have it convenient to the barber's shop any more? I am glad of that, George."

The shot told. The unfortunate George, after an endeavour to collect himself by altering his pose two or three times in rapid succession, finally collapsed, and with an air of mingled pain and dignity, but without losing his ceremonious politeness or unique vocabulary, said—

"Yo' got me dah, sah! Yo' got me dah! De infirmities o' human natcheh, sah, is de common p'operty ob man, and a gemplum like yo'self, sah, a legislato' and a pow'ful speakah, is de las' one to hol' it agin de individual pusson. I confess, sah, de circumstances was propiskuous, de fees fahly good, and de risks inferior. De gemplum who kept de shop was an artess hisself, and had been niggah to Kernel Henderson of Tennessee, and de gemplum I relieved was a Mr. Johnson. But de Kernel, he wouldn't see it in that light, sah, and if you don' mind, sah——"

"I haven't the slightest idea of telling the Colonel or anybody, George," said Paul, smiling; "and I am glad to find on your own account that you are able to put aside any work beyond your duty here."

"Thank you, sah. If yo'll let me introduce yo' to de refreshment, yo'll find it all right now. De Glencoe is dah. De Kernel will be here soon, but he would be pow'ful mo'tified, sah, if yo' didn't hab something afo' he come." He opened a well-filled sideboard as he spoke. It was the first evidence Paul had seen of the Colonel's restored fortunes. He would willingly have contented himself with this mere outward manifestation, but in his desire to soothe the ruffled dignity of the old man he consented to partake of a small glass of spirits. George at once became radiant and communicative. "De Kernel bin gone to Santa Clara

to see de young lady dat's finished her edercation dah—de Kernel's only ward, sah. She's one o' dose million-heiresses and highly connected, sah, wid de old Mexican Gobbermen, I understand. And I reckon dey's been big goin's on doun dar, fo' de Mayer kem hisself fo' de Kernel. Looks like dey might bin a proceshon, sah. Yo' don't know if de young lady bin hab a title, sah? I won't be shuah his honah de Mayer or de Kernel didn't say something about a 'Donna.'"

"Very likely," said Paul, turning away with a faint smile. So it was already in the air! Setting aside the old negro's characteristic exaggeration, there had already been some conversation between the Colonel and the Mayor, which George had vaguely overheard. He might be too late, the alternative might be no longer in his hands. But his discomposure was heightened a moment later by the actual apparition of the returning Pendleton.

He was dressed in a tightly-buttoned blue frock-coat, which fairly accented his tall, thin, military figure, although the top lappel was thrown far enough back to show a fine ruffled cambric shirt and checked gingham necktie, and was itself adorned with a white rosebud in the button-hole. Fawn-coloured trousers strapped over narrow patent-leather boots, and a tall white hat, whose broad mourning-band was a perpetual memory of his mother, who had died in his boyhood, completed his festal transformation. Yet his erect carriage, high aquiline nose, and long grey drooping moustache lent a distinguishing grace to this survival of a bygone fashion, and overrode any irreverent comment. Even his slight limp seemed to give a peculiar character to his massive gold-headed stick, and made it a part of his formal elegance.

Handing George his stick and a military cape he carried easily over his left arm, he greeted Paul warmly, yet with a return of his old dominant manner.

"Glad to see you, Hathaway, and glad to see the boy has

served you better than the last time. If I had known you were coming, I would have tried to get back in time to have breakfast with you. But your friends at 'Rosario'—I think they call it; in my time it was owned by Colonel Briones, and *he* called it 'The Devil's Little Cañon'—detained me with some d—d civilities. Let's see—his name is Woods, isn't it? Used to sell rum to runaway sailors on Long Wharf, and take stores in exchange? Or was it Baker?—Judge Baker? I forget which. Well, sir, they wished to be remembered."

It struck Paul, perhaps unreasonably, that the Colonel's indifference and digression were both a little assumed, and he asked abruptly—

"And you fulfilled your mission?"

"I made the formal transfer, with the Mayor, of the property to Miss Arguello."

"To Miss Arguello?"

"To the Doña Maria Concepcion de Arguello de la Yerba Buena—to speak precisely," said the Colonel slowly. "George, you can take that hat to that blank hatter—what's his blanked name?—I read it only yesterday in a list of the prominent citizens here—and tell him, with my compliments, that I want a *gentleman's* mourning-band around my hat, and not a child's shoe-lace. It may be *his* idea of the value of his own parents—if he ever had any—but I don't care for him to appraise mine. Go!"

As the door closed upon George, Paul turned to the Colonel—

"Then am I to understand that you have agreed to her story?"

The Colonel rose, picked up the decanter, poured out a glass of whisky, and, holding it in his hand, said—

"My dear Hathaway, let us understand each other. As a gentleman, I have made a point through life never to question the age, name, or family of any lady of my acquaint-

ance. Miss Yerba Buena came of age yesterday, and, as she is no longer my ward, she is certainly entitled to the consideration I have just mentioned. If she, therefore, chooses to tack to her name the whole Spanish directory, I don't see why I shouldn't accept it."

Characteristic as this speech appeared to be of the Colonel's ordinary manner, it struck Paul as being only an imitation of his usual frank independence, and made him uneasily conscious of some vague desertion on Pendleton's part. He fixed his bright eyes on his host, who was ostentatiously sipping his liquor, and said—

"Am I to understand that you have heard nothing more from Miss Yerba, either for or against her story? That you still do not know whether she has deceived herself, has been deceived by others, or is deceiving us?"

"After what I have just told you, Mr. Hathaway," said the Colonel, with an increased exaggeration of manner which Paul thought must be apparent even to himself, "I should have but one way of dealing with questions of that kind from anybody but yourself."

This culminating extravagance—taken in connection with Pendleton's passing doubts—actually forced a laugh from Paul in spite of his bitterness.

Colonel Pendleton's face flushed quickly. Like most positive one-idea'd men, he was restricted from any possible humorous combination, and only felt a mysterious sense of being detected in some weakness. He put down his glass.

"Mr. Hathaway," he began, with a slight vibration in his usual dominant accents, "you have lately put me under a sense of personal obligation for a favour which I felt I could accept without derogation from a younger man, because it seemed to be one not only of youthful generosity but of justice, and was not unworthy the exalted ambition of a young man like yourself or the simple deserts of an old man

such as I am. I accepted it, sir, the more readily, because it was entirely unsolicited by me, and seemed to be the spontaneous offering of your own heart. If I have presumed upon it to express myself freely on other matters in a way that only excites your ridicule, I can but offer you an apology, sir. If I have accepted a favour I can neither renounce nor return, I must take the consequences to myself, and even beg *you*, sir, to put up with them."

Remorseful as Paul felt, there was a singular resemblance between the previous reproachful pose of George and this present attitude of his master, as if the mere propinquity of personal sacrifice had made them alike, that struck him with a mingled pathos and ludicrousness. But he said warmly, "It is I who must apologise, my dear Colonel. I am not laughing at your conclusions, but at this singular coincidence with a discovery I have made."

"As how, sir?"

"I find in the report of the Chief of the Police for the year 1850 that Kate Howard was under the protection of a man named Arguello."

The Colonel's exaggeration instantly left him. He stared blankly at Paul. "And you call this a laughing matter, sir?" he said sternly, but in his more natural manner.

"Perhaps not; but I don't think, if you will allow me to say so, my dear Colonel, that *you* have been treating the whole affair very seriously. I left you two months ago utterly opposed to views which you are now treating as of no importance. And yet you wish me to believe that nothing has happened, and that you have no further information than you had then. That this is so, and that you are really no nearer the *facts*, I am willing to believe from your ignorance of what I have just told you, and your concern at it. But that you have not been influenced in your *judgment* of what you do know, I cannot believe." He drew

nearer Pendleton, and laid his hand upon his arm. "I beg you to be frank with me, for the sake of the person whose interests I see you have at heart. In what way will the discovery I have just made affect them? You are not so far prejudiced as to be blind to the fact that it may be dangerous because it seems corroborative."

Pendleton coughed, rose, took his stick, and limped up and down the room, finally dropping into an arm-chair by the window, with his cane between his knees, and the drooping grey silken threads of his long moustache curled nervously between his fingers.

"Mr. Hathaway, I *will* be frank with you. I know nothing of this blank affair—blank it all!—but what I've told you. Your discovery may be a coincidence, nothing more. But I *have* been influenced, sir—influenced by one of the most perfect, goddess-like—yes, sir; one of the most simple girlish creatures that God ever sent upon earth. A woman that I should be proud to claim as my daughter, a woman that would always be the superior of any man who dare aspire to be her husband! A young lady as peerless in her beauty as she is in her accomplishments, and whose equal don't walk this planet! I know, sir, *you* don't follow me; I know, Mr. Hathaway, your Puritan prejudices; your Church proclivities; your worldly sense of propriety; and, above all, sir, the blanked hypocritical, Pharisaic doctrines of your Party—I mean no offence to *you*, sir, personally—blind you to that girl's perfections. She, poor child, herself has seen it and felt it; but never, in her blameless innocence and purity, suspecting the cause. 'There is,' she said to me last night confidentially, 'something strangely antagonistic and repellent in our natures, some undefined and nameless barrier between our ever understanding each other.' You comprehend, Mr. Hathaway, she does full justice to your intentions and your unquestioned abilities.

'I am not blind,' she said, 'to Mr. Hathaway's gifts, and it is very possible the fault lies with me.' Her very words, sir."

"Then you believe she is perfectly ignorant of her real mother?" asked Paul, with a steady voice, but a whitening face.

"As an unborn child," said the Colonel emphatically. "The snow on the Sierras is not more spotlessly pure of any trace or contamination of the mud of the mining ditches, than she of her mother and her past. The knowledge of it, the mere breath of suspicion of it, in her presence would be a profanation, sir! Look at her eye—open as the sky and as clear; look at her face and figure—as clean, sir, as a Blue-Grass thoroughbred! Look at the way she carries herself, whether in those white frillings of her simple school-gown, or that black evening-dress that makes her look like a princess! And, blank me, if she isn't one! There's no poor stock there—no white trash—no mixed blood, sir. Blank it all, sir, if it comes to *that*—the Arguellos—if there's a hound of them living—might go down on their knees to have their name borne by such a creature! By the Eternal, sir, if one of them dared to cross her path with a word that wasn't abject—yes, sir, *abject*, I'd wipe his dust off the earth and send it back to his ancestors before he knew where he was, or my name isn't Harry Pendleton!"

Hopeless and inconsistent as all this was, it was a wonderful sight to see the Colonel, his dark, stern face illuminated with a zealot's enthusiasm, his eyes on fire, the ends of his grey moustache curling around his set jaw, his head thrown back, his legs astride, and his gold-headed stick held in the hollow of his elbow, like a lance at rest! Paul saw it, and knew that this Quixotic transformation was part of *her* triumph, and yet had a miserable consciousness that the charms of this Dulcinea del Toboso had scarcely been exaggerated. He turned his eyes away and said quietly—

"Then you don't think this coincidence will ever awaken any suspicion in regard to her real mother?"

"Not in the least, sir—not in the least," said the Colonel, yet perhaps with more doggedness than conviction of accent. "Nobody but yourself would ever notice that police report, and the connection of that woman's name with his was not notorious, or I should have known it."

"And you believe," continued Paul hopelessly, "that Miss Yerba's selection of the name was purely accidental?"

"Purely—a schoolgirl's fancy. Fancy, did I say? No, sir; by Jove, an inspiration!"

"And," continued Paul, almost mechanically, "you do not think it may be some insidious suggestion of an enemy who knew of this transient relation that no one suspected?"

To his final amazement Pendleton's brow cleared! "An enemy? Gad! you may be right. I'll look into it; and, if that is the case, which I can scarcely dare hope for, Mr. Hathaway, you can safely leave him to *me*."

He looked so supremely confident in his fatuous heroism that Paul could say no more. He rose, and with a faint smile upon his pale face held out his hand. "I think that is all I have to say. When you see Miss Yerba again—as you will, no doubt—you may tell her that I am conscious of no misunderstanding on my part, except perhaps as to the best way I could serve her, and that, but for what she has told *you*, I should certainly have carried away no remembrance of any misunderstanding of *hers*."

"Certainly," said the Colonel, with cheerful philosophy; "I will carry your message with pleasure. You understand how it is, Mr. Hathaway. There is no accounting for these instincts—we can only accept them as they are. But I believe that your intentions, sir, were strictly according to what you conceived to be your duty. You won't take something before you go? Well, then—good-bye."

Two weeks later Paul found among his morning letters an envelope addressed in Colonel Pendleton's boyish scrawling hand. He opened it with an eagerness that no studied self-control nor rigid preoccupation of his duties had yet been able to subdue, and glanced hurriedly at its contents:—

“DEAR SIR,—As I am on the point of sailing for Europe to-morrow to escort Miss Arguello and Miss Woods on an extended visit to England and the Continent, I am desirous of informing you that I have thus far been unable to find any foundation for the suggestions thrown out by you in our last interview. Miss Arguello's Spanish acquaintances have been very select, and limited to a few school friends and Don Cæsar and Doña Anna Briones, tried friends, who are also fellow-passengers with us to Europe. Miss Arguello suggests that some political difference between you and Don Cæsar, which occurred during your visit to Rosario three months ago, may have perhaps given rise to your supposition. She joins me in best wishes for your public career, which even in the distractions of foreign travel and the obligations of her position she will follow from time to time with the greatest interest.—Very respectfully yours,

“HARRY PENDLETON.”

CHAPTER V.

IT was on an August day of 1863 that Paul Hathaway resigned himself and his luggage to the care of the gold-laced, ostensible porter of the Strudle Bad Hof, not without some uncertainty, in a land of uniforms, whether he would eventually be conducted to the barracks, the police office, or the Conservatoire. He was relieved when the omnibus drove into the courtyard of the Bad Hof, and the gold-chained chamberlain, flanked by two green tubs of oleanders, received

him with a gravity calculated to check any preconceived idea he might have that travelling was a trifling affair, or that an arrival at the Bad Hof was not of serious moment. His letters had not yet arrived, for he had, in a fit of restlessness, shortened his route, and he strolled listlessly into the reading-room. Two or three English guests were evidently occupied in eminently respectable reading and writing; two were sitting by the window engaged in subdued but profitable conversation; and two Americans from Boston were contentedly imitating them on the other side of the room. A decent restraint, as of people who were not for a moment to be led into any foreign idea of social gaiety at a watering-place, was visible everywhere. A spectacled Prussian officer in full uniform passed along the hall, halted for a moment at the doorway as if contemplating an armed invasion, thought better of it, and took his uniform away into the sunlight of the open square, where it was joined by other uniforms, and became by contrast a miracle of unbraced levity. Paul stood the Polar silence for a few moments, until one of the readers arose and, taking his book—a Murray—in his hand, walked slowly across the room to a companion, mutely pointed to a passage in the book, remained silent until the other had dumbly perused it, and then walked back again to his seat, having achieved the incident without a word. At which Paul, convinced of his own incongruity, softly withdrew with his hat in his hand, and his eyes fixed devotionally upon it.

It was good after that to get into the slanting sunlight and chequered linden shadows of the *Allée*; to see even a tightly-jacketed cavalry-man naturally walking with Clärchen and her two round-faced and drab-haired young charges; to watch the returning invalid procession, very real and very human, each individual intensely involved in the atmosphere of his own symptoms; and very good after that to turn into

the Thiergarten, where the animals were, however, chiefly of his own species, and shamelessly and openly amusing themselves. It was pleasant to contrast it with his first visit to the place three months before, and correct his crude impressions. And it was still more pleasant suddenly to recognise, under the round flat cap of a general officer, a former traveller who was fond of talking with him about America with an intelligence and understanding of it that Paul had often missed among his own travelled countrymen. It was pleasant to hear his unaffected and simple greeting, to renew their old acquaintance, and to saunter back to the hotel together through the long twilight.

They were only a few squares from the hotel, when Paul's attention was attracted by the curiosity and delight of two or three children before him, who seemed to be following a quaint-looking figure that was evidently not unfamiliar to them. It appeared to be a servant in a striking livery of green with yellow facings and crested silver buttons, but still more remarkable for the indescribable mingling of jaunty ease and conscious dignity with which he carried off his finery. There was something so singular and yet so vaguely reminiscent in his peculiar walk and the exaggerated swing of his light bamboo cane that Paul could not only understand the childish wonder of the passers-by, who turned to look after him, but was stirred with a deeper curiosity. He quickened his pace, but was unable to distinguish anything of the face or features of the stranger, except that his hair under his cocked hat appeared to be tightly curled and powdered. Paul's companion, who was amused at what seemed to be the American's national curiosity, had seen the figure before. "A servant in the suite of some Eastern *Altesse* visiting the baths. You will see stranger things, my friend, in the Strudle Bad. *Par exemple*, your own countrymen, too; the one who has enriched himself by that pork

of Chicago, or that soap, or this candle, in a carriage with the crest of the title he has bought in Italy, with his dollars, and his beautiful daughters, who are seeking more titles with possible matrimonial contingencies."

After an early dinner, Paul found his way to the little theatre. He had already been struck by a highly coloured poster near the *Bahnhof*, purporting that a distinguished German company would give a representation of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and certain peculiarities in the pictorial advertisement of the tableaux gave promise of some entertainment. He found the theatre fairly full: there was the usual contingent of *abonnirte* officers, a fair sprinkling of English and German travellers, but apparently none of his own countrymen. He had no time to examine the house more closely, for the play, commencing with simple punctuality, not only far exceeded the promise of the posters, but of any previous performance of the play he had witnessed. Transported at once to a gorgeous tropical region—the Slave States of America—resplendent with the fruits and palms of Mauritius, and peopled exclusively with Paul and Virginia's companions in striped cotton, Hathaway managed to keep a composed face, until the arrival of the good Southern planter St. Clair as one of the earlier portraits of Goethe, in top boots, light kerseymere breeches, redingote and loose Byron collar, compelled him to shrink into the upper corner of the box with his handkerchief to his face. Luckily, the action passed as the natural effect upon a highly sympathetic nature of religious interviews between a round-faced, flaxen-haired "Kleine Eva" and "Onkeel Tome," occasionally assisted by a Dissenting clergyman in Geneva bands; of excessive brutality with a cattle-whip by a Zamiel-like Legree; of the sufferings of a runaway negro *Zimmermädchen* with a child three shades lighter than herself; and of a painted canvas "man-hunt," where apparently four well-known German com-

posers, on horseback, with flowing hair, top-boots, and a *cor de chasse*, were pursuing, with the aid of a pack of foxhounds, "the much too deeply abused and yet spiritually elevated Onkeel Tome." Paul did not wait for the final apotheosis of "der Kleine Eva," but, in the silence of a hushed audience, made his way into the corridor and down the staircase. He was passing an open door marked "Direction," when his attention was sharply attracted by a small gathering around it, and the sounds of indignant declamation. It was the voice of a countryman—more than that, it was a familiar voice, that he had not heard for three years—the voice of Colonel Harry Pendleton!

"Tell him," said Pendleton, in scathing tones, to some invisible interpreter—"tell him, sir, that a more infamous caricature of the blankest caricature that ever maligned a free people, sir, I never before had the honour of witnessing. Tell him that *I*, sir—I, Harry Pendleton, of Kentucky, a Southerner, sir—an old slaveholder, sir, declare it to be a tissue of falsehoods unworthy the credence of a Christian civilisation like this—unworthy the attention of the distinguished ladies and gentlemen that are gathered here to-night. Tell him, sir, he has been imposed upon. Tell him I am responsible—give him my card and address—personally responsible for what I say. If he wants proofs—blank it all!—tell him you yourself have been a slave—*my* slave, sir! Take off your hat, sir! Ask him to look at you—ask him if he thinks you ever looked or could look like that lop-eared, psalm-singing, white-headed hypocrite on the stage! Ask him, sir, if he thinks that blank ringmaster they call St. Clair looks like *me*!"

At this astounding exordium Paul eagerly pressed forward and entered the bureau. There certainly was Colonel Pendleton, in spotless evening dress; erect, flashing, and indignant; his aquiline nose lifted like a hawk's beak over

his quarry, his iron-grey moustache, now white and waxed, parted like a swallow's tail over his handsome mouth, and between him and the astounded "Direction" stood the apparition of the *Allée*—George! There was no mistaking him now. What Paul had thought was a curled wig or powder was the old negro's own white knotted wool, and the astounding livery he wore was carried off as no one but George could carry it.

But he was still more amazed when the old servant, in a German as exaggerated, as incoherent, but still as fluent and persuasive as his own native speech, began an extravagant but perfectly dignified and diplomatic translation of his master's protests. Where and when, and by what instinct, he had assimilated and made his own the grotesque inversions and ponderous sentimentalities of Teutonic phrasing, Paul could not guess; but it was with breathless wonder that he presently became aware that, so perfect and convincing was the old man's style and deportment, not only the simple officials but even the bystanders were profoundly impressed by this sarrago of absurdity. A happy word here and there, the full title and rank given, even with a slight exaggeration, to each individual, brought a deep and guttural "So!" from lips that would have found it difficult to repeat a line of his ceremonious idiocy.

In their preoccupation neither the Colonel nor George had perceived Paul's entrance, but, as the old servant turned with magnificent courtesy towards the bystanders, his eyes fell upon Paul. A flash of surprise, triumph, and satisfaction lit up his rolling eyes. Paul instantly knew that he not only recognised him, but that he had already heard of and thoroughly appreciated a certain distinguished position that Paul had lately held, and was quick to apply it. Intensifying for a moment the grandiloquence of his manner, he called upon his master's most distinguished and happily arrived

old friend, the Lord Lieutenant Governor of the Golden Californias, to corroborate his statement. Colonel Pendleton started, and grasped Paul's hand warmly. Paul turned to the already half-mollified Director with the diplomatic suggestion that the vivid and realistic acting of the admirable company which he himself had witnessed had perhaps unduly excited his old friend, even as it had undoubtedly thrown into greater relief the usual exaggerations of dramatic representation, and the incident terminated with a profusion of apologies, and the most cordial expressions of international good feeling on both sides.

Yet, as they turned away from the theatre together, Paul could not help noticing that, although the Colonel's first greeting had been spontaneous and unaffected, it was succeeded by an uneasy reserve. Paul made no attempt to break it, and confined himself to a few general inquiries, ending by inviting the Colonel to sup with him at the hotel. Pendleton hesitated. "At any other time, Mr. Hathaway, I should have insisted upon you, as the stranger, supping with me ; but since the absence of—of—the rest of my party—I have given up my suite of rooms at the Bad Hof, and have taken smaller lodgings for myself and the boy at the Schwartze Adler. Miss Woods and Miss Arguello have accepted an invitation to spend a few days at the villa of the Baron and Baroness von Schilprecht—an hour or two from here." He lingered over the title with an odd mingling of impressiveness and inquiry, and glanced at Paul. But Hathaway exhibiting neither emotion nor surprise at the mention of Yerba's name or the title of her host, he continued, "Miss Arguello, I suppose you know, is immensely admired ; she has been, sir, the acknowledged belle of Strudle Bad."

"I can readily believe it," said Paul simply.

"And has taken the position—the position, sir, to which she is entitled."

Without appearing to notice the slight challenge in Pendleton's tone, Paul returned, "I am glad to hear it. The more particularly as, I believe, the Germans are great sticklers for position and pedigree."

"You are right, sir—quite right: they are," said the Colonel proudly—"although"—with a certain premeditated deliberation—"I have been credibly informed that the King can, in certain cases, if he chooses, supply—yes, sir—*supply* a favoured person with ancestors—yes, sir, with *ancestors*!"

Paul cast a quick glance at his companion.

"Yes, sir—that is, we will say, in the case of a lady of inferior rank—or even birth, the King of these parts can, on her marriage with a nobleman—blank it all!—ennoble her father and mother, and their fathers and mothers, though they've been dead, or as good as dead, for years."

"I am afraid that's a slight exaggeration of the rare custom of granting 'noble lands,' or estates that carry hereditary titles with them," said Paul, more emphatically perhaps than the occasion demanded.

"Fact, sir—George there knows it all," said Pendleton. "He gets it from the other servants. I don't speak the language, sir, but *he* does. Picked it up in a year."

"I must compliment him on his fluency, certainly," said Paul, looking at George.

The old servant smiled, yet not without a certain condescension. "Yes, sah; I don' say to a scholar like yo'self, sah, dat I'se got de grandmatrical presichion; but as fah, sah—as fah as de *idiotisms* ob de language goes, sah—it's gen'lly allowed I'm dar! As to what Marse Harry says ob de ignobling ob predecessors, I've had it, sah, from de best authority, sah—de furst, I may say, sah—de real *primâ facie* men—de gemplum ob his Serene Highness, in de korse ob ordinary conversashun, sah."

"That'll do, George," said Pendleton, with paternal

brusqueness. "Run on ahead and tell that blank chamberlain that Mr. Hathaway is one of my friends—and have supper accordingly." As the negro hastened away he turned to Paul: "What he says is true: he's the most popular man or boy in all Strudle Bad—a devilish sight more than his master—and goes anywhere where *I* can't go. Princes and princesses stop and talk to him in the street; the Grand Duke asked permission to have him up in his carriage at the races the other day; and, by the Eternal, sir, he gives the style to all the flunkies in town!"

"And, I see, he dresses the character," observed Paul.

"His own idea—entirely. And, by Jove! he proves to be right. You can't do anything here without a uniform. And they tell me he's got everything correct, down to the crest on the buttons."

They walked on in silence for a few moments, Pendleton retaining a certain rigidity of step and bearing which Paul had come to recognise as indicating some uneasiness or mental disturbance on his part. Hathaway had no intention of precipitating the confidence of his companion. Perhaps experience had told him it would come soon enough. So he spoke carelessly of himself. How the need of a year's relaxation and change had brought him abroad, his journeyings, and finally, how he had been advised by his German physician to spend a few weeks at Strudle Bad preparatory to the voyage home. Yet he was perfectly aware that the Colonel from time to time cast a furtive glance at his face. "And *you*," he said in conclusion, "when do you intend to return to California?"

The Colonel hesitated slightly. "I shall remain in Europe until Miss Arguello is—settled—I mean," he added hurriedly, "until she has—ahem!—completed her education in foreign ways and customs. You see, Hathaway, I have constituted myself, after a certain fashion, I may say—still her guardian.

I am an old man, with neither kith nor kin myself, sir—I'm a little too old-fashioned for the boys over there"—with a vague gesture towards the West, which, however, told Paul how near it still was to him. "But then, among the old fogeys here—blank it all!—it isn't noticed. So I look after her, you see, or rather make myself responsible for her generally—although, of course, she has other friends and associates, you understand, more of her own age and tastes."

"And I've no doubt she's perfectly satisfied," said Paul, in a tone of conviction.

"Well, yes, sir, I presume so," said the Colonel slowly; "but I've sometimes thought, Mr. Hathaway, that it would have been better if she'd have had a woman's care—the protection, you understand, of an elderly woman of society. That seems to be the style here, you know—a chaperon, they call it. Now, Milly Woods, you see, is about the same age, and the Doña Anna, of course, is older, but, blank it! she's as big a flirt as the rest—I mean," he added, correcting himself sharply, "she lacks balance, sir, and—what shall I call it?—self-abnegation."

"Then Doña Anna is still of your party?" asked Paul.

"She is, sir, and her brother, Don Cæsar. I have thought it advisable, on Yerba's account, to keep up as much as possible the suggestion of her Spanish relationship—although, by reason of their absurd ignorance of geography and political divisions out here, there is a prevailing impression that she is a South American. A fact, sir. I have myself been mistaken for the Dictator of one of those infernal Republics, and I have been pointed out as ruling over a million or two of niggers like George!"

There was no trace of any conception of humour in the Colonel's face, although he uttered a short laugh, as if in polite acceptance of the possibility that Paul might have one. Far from that, his companion, looking at the striking

profile and erect figure at his side—at the long white moustache which drooped from his dark cheeks, and remembering his own sensations at first seeing George—thought the popular belief not so wonderful. He was even forced to admit that the perfect unconsciousness on the part of master and man of any incongruity or peculiarity in themselves assisted the public misconception. And it was, I fear, with a feeling of wicked delight that, on entering the hotel, he hailed the evident consternation of those correct fellow-countrymen from whom he had lately fled, at what they apparently regarded as a national scandal. He overheard their hurried assurance to their English friends that his companions were *not* from Boston, and enjoyed their mortification that this explanation did not seem to detract from the interest and relief with which the Britons surveyed them, or the open admiration of the Germans.

Although Pendleton somewhat unbent during supper, he did not allude to the secret of Yerba's parentage, nor of any tardy confidence of hers. To all appearance the situation remained as it was three years ago. He spoke of her great popularity as an heiress and a beautiful woman, and the marked attentions she received. He doubted not that she had rejected very distinguished offers, but she kept that to herself. She was perfectly competent to do so. She was no giddy girl, to be flattered or deceived; on the contrary, he had never known a cooler or more sensible woman. She knew her own worth. When she met the man who satisfied her ambition and understanding, she would marry, and not before. He did not know what that ambition was; it was something exalted, of course. He could only say, of his own knowledge, that last year, when they were on the Italian lakes, there was a certain Prince—Mr. Hathaway would understand why he did not mention names—who was not only attentive to her, but attentive to *him*, sir, by Jove!

and most significant in his inquiries. It was the only occasion when he, the Colonel, had ever spoken to her on such subjects; and, knowing that she was not indifferent to the fellow, who was not bad of his kind, he had asked her why she had not encouraged his suit. She had said, with a laugh, that he couldn't marry her unless he gave up his claim of succession to a certain reigning house; and she wouldn't accept him *without it*. Those were her words, sir, and he could only say that the Prince left a few days afterwards, and they had never seen him since. As to the princelings and counts and barons, she knew to a day the date of their patents of nobility, and what privileges they were entitled to: she could tell to a dot the value of their estates, the amount of their debts, and, by Jove! sir, the amount of mortgages she was expected to pay off before she married them. She knew the amount of income she had to bring to the Prussian army, from the general to the lieutenant. She understood her own value and her rights. There was a young English lordling she met on the Rhine, whose boyish ways and simplicity seemed to please her. They were great friends; but he wanted him—the Colonel—to induce her to accept an invitation for both to visit his mother's home in England, that his people might see her. But she declined, sir! She declined to pass in review before his mother. She said it was for *him* to pass in review before *her* mother.

"Did she say that?" interrupted Paul, fixing his bright eyes upon the Colonel.

"If she had one, sir, if she had one," corrected the Colonel hastily. "Of course it was only an illustration. That she is an orphan is generally known, sir."

There was a dead silence for a few moments. The Colonel leant back in his chair and pulled his moustache. Paul turned away his eyes, and seemed absorbed in reflection. After a moment the Colonel coughed, pushed aside

his glass, and leaning across the table, said, "I have a favour to ask of you, Mr. Hathaway."

There was such a singular change in the tone of his voice, an unexpected relaxation of some artificial tension—a relaxation which struck Paul so pathetically as being as much physical as mental, as if he had suddenly been overtaken in some exertion by the weakness of age—that he looked up quickly. Certainly, although still erect and lightly grasping his moustache, the Colonel looked older.

"By all means, my dear Colonel," said Paul warmly.

"During the time you remain here you can hardly help meeting Miss Arguello, perhaps frequently. It would be strange if you did not: it would appear to everybody still stranger. Give me your word as a gentleman that you will not make the least allusion to her of the past—nor reopen the subject."

Paul looked fixedly at the Colonel. "I certainly had no intention of doing so," he said after a pause, "for I thought it was already settled by you beyond disturbance or discussion. But do I understand you, that *she* has shown any uneasiness regarding it? From what you have just told me of her plans and ambition, I can scarcely imagine that she has any suspicion of the real facts."

"Certainly not," said the Colonel hurriedly. "But I have your promise."

"I promise you," said Paul, after a pause, "that I shall neither introduce nor refer to the subject myself, and that if *she* should question me again regarding it, which is hardly possible, I will reveal nothing without your consent."

"Thank you," said Pendleton, without, however, exhibiting much relief in his face. "She will return here to-morrow."

"I thought you said she was absent for some days," said Paul.

"Yes; but she is coming back to say good-bye to Doña

Anna, who arrives here with her brother the same day, on their way to Paris."

It flashed through Paul's mind that the last time he had seen her was in the company of the Briones. It was not a pleasant coincidence. Yet he was not aware that it had affected him, until he saw the Colonel watching him.

"I believe you don't fancy the brother," said Pendleton.

For an instant Paul was strongly tempted to avow his old vague suspicions of Don Cæsar, but the utter hopelessness of reopening the whole subject again, and his recollection of the passage in Pendleton's letter that purported to be Yerba's own theory of his dislike, checked him in time. He only said, "I don't remember whether I had any cause for disliking Don Cæsar; I can tell better when I see him again," and changed the subject. A few moments later the Colonel summoned George from some lower region of the hotel, and rose to take his leave. "Miss Arguello, with her maid and courier, will occupy her old suite of rooms here," he remarked, with a return of his old imperiousness. "George has given the orders for her. I shall not change my present lodgings, but, of course, will call every day. Good-night!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning Paul could not help noticing an increased and even exaggerated respect paid him by the hotel attendants. He was asked if his *Excellency* would be served with breakfast in a private room, and his condescension in selecting the public coffee-room struck the obsequious chamberlain, but did not prevent him from preceding Paul backwards to the table, and summoning a waiter to attend specially upon "milor." Surmising that George and the Colonel might be in some way connected with this ex-

travagance, he postponed an investigation till he should have seen them again. And, although he hardly dared to confess it to himself, the unexpected prospect of meeting Yerba again fully preoccupied his thoughts. He had believed that he would eventually see her in Europe, in some vague and indefinite way and hour : it had been in his mind when he started from California. That it would be so soon, and in such a simple and natural manner, he had never conceived.

He had returned from his morning walk to the *Brunnen*, and was sitting idly in his room, when there was a knock at the door. It opened to a servant bearing a salver with a card. Paul lifted it with a slight tremor, not at the engraved name of "Maria Concepcion de Arguellos de la Yerba Buena," but at the remembered school-girl hand that had pencilled underneath the words "wishes the favour of an audience with his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant Governor of the Californias."

Paul looked inquiringly at the servant. "The *gnädige Fräulein* was in her own salon. Would *Excellency* walk that way? It was but a step ; in effect, the next apartment."

Paul followed him into the hall with wondering steps. The door of the next room was open, and disclosed a handsomely furnished salon. A tall graceful figure rose quickly from behind a writing-table, and advanced with outstretched hands and a frank yet mischievous smile. It was Yerba.

Standing there in a greyish hat, mantle, and travelling dress, all of one subdued yet alluring tone, she looked as beautiful as when he had last seen her—and yet—unlike. For a brief bitter moment his instincts revolted at this familiar yielding up in his fair countrywomen of all that was distinctively original in them to alien tastes and habits, and he resented the plastic yet characterless mobility which made Yerba's Parisian dress and European manner fit her so charmingly and yet express so little. For a brief critical

moment he remembered the placid, unchanging simplicity of German and the inflexible and ingrained reserve of English girlhood, in opposition to this indistinctive cosmopolitan grace. But only for a moment. As soon as she spoke a certain flavour of individuality seemed to return to her speech.

"Confess," she said, "it was a courageous thing for me to do. You might have been somebody else—a real Excellency—or Heaven knows what! Or, what is worse, in your new magnificence you might have forgotten one of your oldest, most humble, but faithful subjects." She drew back and made him a mock ceremonious curtsy, that even in its charming exaggeration suggested to Paul, however, that she had already made it somewhere seriously.

"But what does it all mean?" he asked, smiling, feeling not only his doubts and uneasiness vanish, but even the years of separation melt away in her presence. "I know I went to bed last night a very humble individual, and yet I seem to awaken this morning a very exalted personage. Am I really Commander of the Faithful, or am I dreaming? Might I trouble you, as my predecessor Abou Hassan did Sweetlips, to bite my little finger?"

"Do you mean to say you have not seen the *Anzeiger*?" she returned, taking a small German printed sheet from the table and pointing to a paragraph. Paul took the paper. Certainly there was the plain announcement among the arrivals of "His Excellency Paul Hathaway, Lord Lieutenant Governor of the Californias." A light flashed upon him.

"This is George's work. He and Colonel Pendleton were here with me last night."

"Then you have seen the Colonel already?" she said, with a scarcely perceptible alteration of expression, which, however, struck Paul.

"Yes. I met him at the theatre last evening." He was about to plunge into an animated description of the Colonel's

indignation, but checked himself, he knew not why. But he was thankful the next moment that he had.

"That accounts for everything," she said, lifting her pretty shoulders with a slight shrug of weariness. "I had to put a stop to George's talking about *me* three months ago—his extravagance is something *too* awful. And the Colonel, who is completely in his hands—trusting him for everything, even the language—doesn't see it."

"But he is extravagant in the praise of his friends only, and you certainly justify all he can say."

She was taking off her hat, and stopped for a moment to look at him thoughtfully, with the soft tendrils of her hair clinging to her forehead. "Did the Colonel talk much about me?"

"A great deal. In fact, I think we talked of nothing else. He has told me of your triumphs and your victims ; of your various campaigns and your conquests. And yet I dare say he has not told me all—and I am dying to hear more."

She had laid down her hat and unloosed a large bow of her mantle, but stopped suddenly in the midst of it and sat down again. "I wish you'd do something for me."

"You have only to name it."

"Well, drop all this kind of talk ! Try to think of me as if I had just come from California—or, better, as if you had never known anything of me at all—and we met for the first time. You could, I dare say, make yourself very agreeable to such a young lady who was willing to be pleased—why not to me ? I venture to say you have not ever troubled yourself about me since we last met. No—hear me through—why then should you wish to talk over what didn't concern you at the time ? Promise me you will stop this reminiscent gossip, and I promise you *I* will not only not bore you with it, but take care that it is not intruded upon you by others. Make yourself pleasant to me by talking about

yourself and your prospects—anything but *me*—and I will throw over those princes and barons that the Colonel has raved about and devote myself to you while you are here. Does that suit your Excellency?" She had crossed her knees, and, with her hands clasped over them, and the toe of her small boot advanced behind her skirt, leaned forward in the attitude he remembered to have seen her take in the summer-house at Rosario.

"Perfectly," he said.

"How long will you be here?"

"About three weeks : that, I believe, is the time allotted for my cure."

"Are you really ill," she said quietly, "or imagine yourself so?"

"It amounts to about the same thing. But my cure may not take so long," he added, fixing his bright eyes upon her.

She returned his gaze thoughtfully, and they remained looking at each other silently.

"Then you are stronger than you give yourself credit for. That is very often the case," she said quietly. "There," she added in another tone, "it is settled. You will come and go as you like, using this salon as your own. Stay, we can do something to-day. What do you say to a ride in the forest this afternoon? Milly isn't here yet, but it will be quite proper for you to accompany me on horseback, though, of course, we couldn't walk a hundred yards down the *Allée* together unless we were *verlobt*."

"But," said Paul, "you are expecting company this afternoon. Don Cæsar—I mean, Miss Briones and her brother are coming here to say good-bye."

She regarded him curiously, but without emotion.

"Colonel Pendleton should have added that they were to remain here overnight as my guests," she said composedly.

"And of course we shall be back in time for dinner. But

that is nothing to you. You have only to be ready at three o'clock. I will see that the horses are ordered. I often ride here, and the people know my tastes and habits. We will have a pleasant ride and a good long talk together, and I'll show you a ruin and a distant view of the villa where I have been staying." She held out her hand with a frank girlish smile, and even a girlish anticipation of pleasure in her brown eyes. He bent over her slim fingers for a moment, and withdrew.

When he was in his own room again, he was conscious only of a strong desire to avoid the Colonel until after his ride with Yerba. He would keep his word so far as to abstain from allusion to her family or her past; indeed, he had his own opinion of its futility. But it would be strange if, with his past experience, he could not find some other way to determine her convictions or win her confidence during those two hours of companionship. He would accept her terms fairly; if she had any ulterior design in her advances, he would detect it; if she had the least concern for him, she could not continue long an artificial friendship. But he must not think of that!

By absenting himself from the hotel he managed to keep clear of Pendleton until the hour arrived. He was gratified to find Yerba in the simplest and most sensible of habits, as if she had already divined his tastes and had wished to avoid attracting undue attention. Nevertheless, it very prettily accentuated her tall graceful figure, and Paul, albeit like most artistic admirers of the sex, not recognising a woman on a horse as a particularly harmonious spectacle, was forced to admire her. Both rode well and naturally—having been brought up in the same Western school—the horses recognised it, and instinctively obeyed them, and their conversation had the easy deliberation and inflection of a *tête-à-tête*. Paul, in view of her previous hint, talked to her of himself

and his fortunes—of which she appeared, however, to have some knowledge. His health had obliged him lately to abandon politics and office; he had been successful in some ventures, and had become a junior partner in a bank with foreign correspondence. She listened to him for some time with interest and attention, but at last her face became abstracted and thoughtful. "I wish I were a man!" she said suddenly.

Paul looked at her quickly. For the first time he detected in the ring of her voice something of the passionate quality he fancied he had always seen in her face.

"Except that it might give you better control of your horse, I don't see why," said Paul. "And I don't entirely believe you."

"Why?"

"Because no woman really wishes to be a man unless she is conscious of her failure as a woman."

"And how do you know I'm not?" she said, checking her horse and looking in his face. A quick conviction that she was on the point of some confession sprang into his mind, but unfortunately showed in his face. She beat back his eager look with a short laugh. "There, don't speak, and don't look like that. That remark was worthy the usual artless maiden's invitation to a compliment, wasn't it? Let us keep to the subject of yourself. Why, with your political influence, don't you get yourself appointed to some diplomatic position over here?"

"There are none in our service. You wouldn't want me to sink myself in some absurd social functions, which are called by that name, merely to become the envy and hatred of a few rich Republicans, like your friends who haunt foreign courts?"

"That's not a pretty speech—but I suppose I invited *that* too. Don't apologise. I'd rather see you flare out

like that than pay compliments. Yet I fancy you're a diplomatist, for all that."

"You did me the honour to believe I was one once, when I was simply the most palpable ass and bungler living," said Paul bitterly.

She was still sweetly silent, apparently preoccupied in smoothing out the mane of her walking horse. "Did I?" she said softly. He drew close beside her.

"How different the vegetation is here from what it is with us!" she said with nervous quickness, directing his attention to the grass road beneath them, without lifting her eyes. "I don't mean what is cultivated—for I suppose it takes centuries to make the lawns they have in England—but even here the blades of grass seem to press closer together, as if they were crowded or overpopulated, like the country; and this forest, which has been always wild and was a hunting park, has a *blasé* look, as if it was already tired of the unchanging traditions and monotony around it. I think over there Nature affects and influences us; here, I fancy, it is itself affected by the people."

"I think a good deal of Nature comes over from America for that purpose," he said drily.

"And I think you are breaking your promise—besides being a goose!" she retorted smartly. Nevertheless, for some occult reason they both seemed relieved by this exquisite witticism, and trotted on amicably together. When Paul lifted his eyes to hers he could see that they were suffused with a tender mischief, as of a reproving yet secretly admiring sister, and her strangely delicate complexion had taken on itself that faint Alpine glow that was more of an illumination than a colour. "There," she said gaily, pointing with her whip as the wood opened upon a glade through which the parted trees showed a long blue curvature of

distant hills; "you see that white thing lying like a snow-drift on the hills?"

"Or the family washing on a hedge."

"As you please. Well, that is the villa."

"And you were very happy there?" said Paul, watching her girlishly animated face.

"Yes; and as you don't ask questions, I'll tell you why. There is one of the sweetest old ladies there that I ever met—the perfection of old-time courtliness with all the motherishness of a German woman. She was very kind to me, and, as she had no daughter of her own, I think she treated me as if I was one. At least, I can imagine how one would feel to her, and what a woman like that could make of any girl. You laugh, Mr. Hathaway, you don't understand—but you don't know what an advantage it would be to a girl to have a mother like that, and know that she could fall back on her and hold her own against anybody. She's equipped from the start, instead of being handicapped. It's all very well to talk about the value of money. It can give you everything but one thing—the power to do without it."

"I think its purchasing value would include even the *gnädige Frau*," said Paul, who had laughed only to hide the uneasiness that Yerba's approach to the tabooed subject had revived in him.

She shook her head; then, recovering her tone of gentle banter, said: "There—I've made a confession. If the Colonel talks to you again about my conquests, you will know that at present my affections are centred on the Baron's mother. I admit it's a strong point in his—in *anybody's*—favour, who can show an unblemished maternal pedigree. What a pity it is you are an orphan, like myself, Mr. Hathaway! For I fancy your mother must have been a very perfect woman. A great deal of her tact and propriety has descended to you. Only it would have been nicer if

she had given it to you, like pocket-money, as occasion required—which you might have shared with me—than leaving it to you in one thumping legacy.”

It was impossible to tell how far the playfulness of her brown eyes suggested any ulterior meaning, for, as Paul again drew eagerly towards her, she sent her horse into a rapid canter before him. When he was at her side again she said, “There is still the ruin to see on our way home. It is just off here to the right. But if you wish to go over it we shall have to dismount at the foot of the slope and walk up. It hasn’t any story or legend that I know of; I looked over the guide-book to cram for it before you came—but there was nothing. So you can invent what you like.”

They dismounted at the beginning of a gentle acclivity, where an ancient waggon-road, now grass-grown, rose smooth as a glacié. Tying their horses to two moplike bushes, they climbed the slope hand in hand like children. There were a few winding broken steps, part of a fallen archway, a few feet of vaulted corridor, a sudden breach—the sky beyond—and that was all! Not all—for before them, overlooked at first, lay a chasm covering half an acre, in which the whole of the original edifice—tower, turrets, walls, and battlements—had been apparently cast, inextricably mixed and mingled at different depths and angles, with here and there, like mushrooms from a dustheap, a score of trees upspringing.

“This is not Time—but gunpowder,” said Paul, leaning over a parapet of the wall and gazing at the abyss, with a slight grimace.

“It don’t look very romantic, certainly,” said Yerba. “I only saw it from the road before. I’m dreadfully sorry,” she added, with mock penitence. “I suppose, however, *something* must have happened here.”

“There may have been nobody in the house at the time,” said Paul gravely. “The family may have been at the baths.”

They stood close together, their elbows resting upon the broken wall, and almost touching. Beyond the abyss and darker forest they could see the more vivid green and regular lines of the plane-trees of Strudle Bad, the glitter of a spire, or the flash of a dome. From the abyss itself arose a cool odour of moist green leaves, the scent of some unseen blossoms, and around the baking vines on the hot wall the hum of apparently taskless and disappointed bees. There was nobody in sight in the forest road, no one working in the bordering fields, and no suggestion of the present. There might have been three or four centuries between them and Strudle Bad.

"The legend of this place," said Paul, glancing at the long brown lashes and oval outline of the cheek so near his own, "is simple, yet affecting. A cruel, remorseless, but fascinating Hexie was once loved by a simple shepherd. He had never dared to syllable his hopeless affection, or claim from her a syllabled—perhaps I should say a one-syllabled—reply. He had followed her from remote lands, dumbly worshipping her, building in his foolish brain an air-castle of happiness, which by reason of her magic power she could always see plainly in his eyes. And one day, beguiling him in the depths of the forest, she led him to a fair-seeming castle, and, bidding him enter its portals, offered to show him a realisation of his dream. But, lo! even as he entered the stately corridor it seemed to crumble away before him, and disclosed a hideous abyss beyond, in which the whole of that goodly palace lay in heaped and tangled ruins—the fitting symbol of his wrecked and shattered hopes."

She drew back a little way from him, but still holding on to the top of the broken wall with one slim gauntleted hand, and swung herself to one side, while she surveyed him with smiling parted lips and conscious eyelids. He promptly covered her hand with his own, but she did not seem to notice it.

"That is not the story," she said, in a faint voice that even her struggling sauciness could not make steadier. "The true story is called 'The Legend of the Goose-Girl of Strudle Bad and the enterprising Gosling.' There was once a goose-girl of the plain who tried honestly to drive her geese to market, but one eccentric and wilful gosling——Mr. Hathaway! Stop—please—I beg you let me go!"

He had caught her in his arms—the one encircling her waist, the other hand still grasping hers. She struggled, half laughing; yielding for a breathless moment as his lips brushed her cheek, and—threw him off. "There!" she said; "that will do: the story was not illustrated."

"But, Yerba," he said, with passionate eagerness, "hear me—it is all God's truth—I love you!"

She drew back farther, shaking the dust of the wall from the folds of her habit. Then, with a lower voice and a paler cheek, as if his lips had sent her blood and utterance back to her heart, she said, "Come, let us go."

"But not until you've heard me, Yerba."

"Well, then—I believe you—there!" she said, looking at him.

"You believe me?" he repeated eagerly, attempting to take her hand again.

She drew back still farther. "Yes," she said, "or I shouldn't be here now. There! that must suffice you. And if you wish me still to believe you, you will not speak of this again while we are out together. Come, let us go back to the horses."

He looked at her with all his soul. She was pale, but composed, and—he could see—determined. He followed her without a word. She accepted his hand to support her again down the slope without embarrassment or reminiscent emotion. The whole scene through which he had just passed might have been buried in the abyss and ruins behind her.

As she placed her foot in his hand to remount, and for a moment rested her weight upon his shoulder, her brown eyes met his frankly and without a tremor.

Nor was she content with this. As Paul at first rode on silently, his heart filled with unsatisfied yearning, she rallied him mischievously. Was it kind in him on this, their first day together, to sulk in this fashion? Was it a promise for their future excursions? Did he intend to carry his lugubrious visage through the *Allée* and up to the courtyard of the hotel, to proclaim his sentimental condition to the world? At least she trusted he would not show it to Milly, who might remember that this was only the *second time* they had met each other. There was something so sweetly reasonable in this, and withal not without a certain hopefulness for the future, to say nothing of the half-mischievous, half-reproachful smile that accompanied it, that Paul exerted himself, and eventually recovered his lost gaiety. When they at last drew up in the courtyard, with the flush of youth and exercise in their faces, Paul felt he was the object of envy to the loungers, and of fresh gossip to Strudle Bad. It struck him less pleasantly that two dark faces, which had been previously regarding him in the gloom of the corridor and vanished as he approached, reappeared some moments later in Yerba's salon as Don Cæsar and Doña Anna, with a benignly different expression. Doña Anna especially greeted him with so much of the ostentatious archness of a confident and forgiving woman to a momentarily recreant lover that he felt absurdly embarrassed in Yerba's presence. He was thinking how he could excuse himself, when he noticed a beautiful basket of flowers on the table and a tiny note bearing a baron's crest. Yerba had put it aside with—as it seemed to him at the moment—an almost too pronounced indifference—and an indifference that was strongly contrasted to Doña Anna's eagerly expressed enthusiasm over the offering, and her

ultimate supplications to Paul and her brother to admire its beauties and the wonderful taste of the donor.

All this seemed so incongruous with Paul's feelings, and above all with the recollection of his scene with Yerba, that he excused himself from dining with the party, alleging an engagement with his old fellow-traveller the German officer, whose acquaintance he had renewed. Yerba did not press him; he even fancied she looked relieved. Colonel Pendleton was coming; Paul was not loth, in his present frame of mind, to dispense with his company. A conviction that the Colonel's counsel was not the best guide for Yerba, and that in some vague way their interests were antagonistic, had begun to force itself upon him. He had no intention of being disloyal to her old guardian, but he felt that Pendleton had not been frank with him since his return from Rosario. Had he ever been so with *her*? He sometimes doubted his disclaimer.

He was lucky in finding the General disengaged, and together they dined at a restaurant and spent the evening at the *Kursaal*. Later, at the Residenz Club, the General leaned over his beer-glass and smilingly addressed his companion.

"So I hear you, too, are a conquest of the beautiful South American."

For an instant Paul, recognising only Doña Anna under that epithet, looked puzzled.

"Come, my friend," said the General, regarding him with some amusement, "I am an older man than you, yet I hardly think I could have ridden out with such a goddess without becoming her slave."

Paul felt his face flush in spite of himself. "Ah! you mean Miss Arguello," he said hurriedly, his colour increasing at his own mention of that name as if he were imposing it upon his honest companion. "She is an old acquaintance of mine—from my own state—California."

"Ah, so," said the General, lifting his eyebrows in profound apology. "A thousand pardons."

"Surely," said Paul, with a desperate attempt to recover his equanimity, "*you* ought to know our geography better."

"So, I am wrong. But still the name—Arguello—surely that is not American? Still, they say she has no accent, and does not look like a Mexican."

For an instant Paul was superstitiously struck with the fatal infelicity of Yerba's selection of a foreign name, that now seemed only to invite that comment and criticism which she should have avoided. Nor could he explain it at length to the General without assisting and accentuating the deception, which he was always hoping in some vague way to bring to an end. He was sorry he had corrected the General; he was furious that he had allowed himself to be confused.

Happily his companion had misinterpreted his annoyance, and with impulsive German friendship threw himself into what he believed to be Paul's feelings. "*Donnerwetter!* Your beautiful countrywoman is made the subject of curiosity just because that stupid Baron is persistent in his serious attentions. That is quite enough, my good friend, to make *Klatschen* here among those animals who do not understand the freedom of an American girl, or that an heiress may have something else to do with her money than to expend it on the Baron's mortgages. But"—he stopped, and his simple, honest face assumed an air of profound and sagacious cunning—"I am glad to talk about it with you, who, of course, are perfectly familiar with the affair. I shall now be able to know what to say. My word, my friend, has some weight here, and I shall use it. And now you shall tell me *who* is our lovely friend, and *who* were her parents and her kindred in her own home. Her associates here, you possibly know, are an impossible Colonel and his never-before-approached

valet, with some South American Indian planters, and, I believe, a pork-butcher's daughter. But of *them*—it makes nothing. Tell me of *her* people."

With his kindly serious face within a few inches of Paul's, and sympathising curiosity beaming from his pince-nez, he obliged the wretched and conscience-stricken Hathaway to respond with a detailed account of Yerba's parentage as projected by herself and indorsed by Colonel Pendleton. He dwelt somewhat particularly on the romantic character of the Trust, hoping to draw the General's attention away from the question of relationship, but he was chagrined to find that the honest warrior evidently confounded the Trust with some eleemosynary institution, and sympathetically glossed it over. "Of course," he said, "the Mexican Minister at Berlin would know all about the Arguello family; so there would be no question there."

Paul was not sorry when the time came to take leave of his friend; but, once again in the clear moonlight and fresh, balmy air of the *Allée*, he forgot the unpleasantness of the interview. He found himself thinking only of his ride with Yerba. Well! he had told her that he loved her. She knew it now, and, although she had forbidden him to speak further, she had not wholly rejected it. It must be her morbid consciousness of the mystery of her birth that withheld a return of her affections—some half-knowledge, perhaps, that she would not divulge, yet that kept her unduly sensitive of accepting his love. He was satisfied there was no entanglement; her heart was virgin. He even dared to hope that she had *always* cared for him. It was for *him* to remove all obstacles—to prevail upon her to leave this place and return to America with him as her husband, the guardian of her good name, and the custodian of her secret. At times the strains of a dreamy German waltz, played in the distance, brought back to him the brief moment that his arm had

encircled her waist by the crumbling wall, and his pulses grew languid, only to leap firmer the next moment with more desperate resolve. He would win her, come what may! He could never have been in earnest before; he loathed and hated himself for his previous passive acquiescence to her fate. He had been a weak tool of the Colonel's from the first; he was even now handicapped by a preposterous promise he had given him! Yes, she was right to hesitate—to question his ability to make her happy! He had found her here, surrounded by stupidity and cupidity—to give it no other name—so patent that she was the common gossip, and had offered nothing but a boyish declaration! As he strode into the hotel that night, it was well that he did not meet the unfortunate Colonel on the staircase!

It was very late, although there was still visible a light in Yerba's salon, shining on her balcony, which extended before and included his own window. From time to time he could hear the murmur of voices. It was too late to avail himself of the invitation to join them, even if his frame of mind had permitted it. He was too nervous and excited to go to bed, and, without lighting his candle, he opened the French window that gave upon the balcony, drew a chair in the recess behind the curtain, and gazed upon the night. It was very quiet; the moon was high, the square was sleeping in a trance of chequered shadows, like a gigantic chessboard, with black foreshortened trees for pawns. The click of a cavalry sabre, the sound of a footfall on the pavement of the distant Königsstrasse were distinctly audible; a far-off railway whistle was startling in its abruptness. In the midst of this calm the opening of the door of the salon, with the sudden uplifting of voices in the hall, told Paul that Yerba's guests were leaving. He heard Doña Anna's arch accents—arch even to Colonel Pendleton's monotonous baritone!—Milly's high, rapid utterances, the suave falsetto of Don

Cæsar, and *her* voice, he thought a trifle wearied—the sound of retiring footsteps, and all was still again.

So still that the rhythmic beat of the distant waltz returned to him with a distinctiveness that he could idly follow. He thought of Rosario and the rose-breath of the open windows with a strange longing, and remembered the half-stifled sweetness of her happy voice rising with it from the verandah. Why had he ever let it pass from him then, and waft its fragrance elsewhere? Why—— What was that?

The slight turning of a latch! The creaking of the French window of the salon, and somebody had slipped softly half out on the balcony. His heart stopped beating. From his position in the recess of his own window, with his back to the partition of the salon, he could see nothing. Yet he did not dare to move. For with the quickened senses of a lover he felt the diffused and perfumed aura of *her* presence, of *her* garments, of *her* flesh flow in upon him through the open window, and possess his whole breathless being! It was *she*! Like him, perhaps, longing to enjoy the perfect night—like him, perhaps, thinking of——

“So you ar-range to get rid of me—ha! like thees? To tur-rn me off from your heels like a dog who have follow you—but without a word—without a—a—thanks—without a ’ope! Ah!—we have ser-rved you—me and my sister; we are the or-range dry—now we can go! Like the old shoe, we are to be flung away! Good! But I am here again—you see. I shall speak, and you shall hear-r.”

Don Cæsar’s voice—alone with her! Paul gripped his chair and sat upright.

“Stop! Stay where you are! How dared you return here?” It was Yerba’s voice, on the balcony, low and distinct.

“Shut the window! I shall speak with you what you will not the world to hear.”

"I prefer to keep where I am, since you have crept into this room like a thief."

"A thief! Good!" He broke out in Spanish, and, as if no longer fearful of being overheard, had evidently drawn nearer the window. "A thief. Ha! *muy bueno*—but it is not *I*, you understand—I, Cæsar Briones, who am the thief! No! It is that swaggering *espadachin*—that *fanfarron* of a Colonel Pendleton—that pattern of an official, Mr. Hathaway—that most beautiful heiress of the Californias, Miss *Arguello*—that are thieves! Yes—of a *name*—Miss Arguello—of a *name*! The name of Arguello!"

Paul rose to his feet.

"Ah, so! You start—you turn pale—you flash your eyes, Señora, but you think you have deceived me all these years. You think I did not see your game at Rosario—yes, even when that foolish Castro *muchacha* first put that idea in your head. Who furnished you the facts you wanted? I—Mother of God!—*such facts*!—I, who knew the Arguello pedigree—I, who know it was as impossible for you to be a daughter of them as—what? let me think—as—as it is impossible for you to be the wife of that Baron whom you would deceive with the rest! Ah, yes; it was a high flight for you, Mees—Mees—Doña Fulana—a noble game for you to bring down!"

Why did she not speak? What was she doing? If she had but uttered a single word of protest, of angry dismissal, Paul would have flown to her side. It could not be the paralysis of personal fear: the balcony was wide; she could easily pass to the end; she could even see his open window.

"Why did I do this? Because I loved you, Señora—and you knew it! Ah! you can turn your face away now; you can pretend to misunderstand me, as you did a moment ago; you can part from me now like a mere acquaintance—but it was not always so! No; it was *you* who brought me here, your eyes that smiled into mine—and drove home the

Colonel's request that I and my sister should accompany you. God! I was weak then! You smile, Señora; you think you have succeeded—you and your pompous Colonel and your clever Governor! You think you have compromised me, and perjured *me*, because of this. You are wrong! You think I dare not speak to this puppet of a Baron, and that I have no proofs. You are wrong!"

"And even if you can produce them, what care I?" said Yerba unexpectedly, yet in a voice so free from excitement and passion that the weariness which Paul had at first noticed seemed to be the only dominant tone. "Suppose you prove that I am not an Arguello. Good! You have yet to show that a connection with any of your race would be anything but a disgrace."

"Ah! you defy me, little one! *Caramba!* Listen, then! You do not know all! When you thought I was only helping you to fabricate your claim to the Arguellos' name, I was finding out *who you really were!* Ah! It was not so difficult as you fondly hope, Señora. We were not all brutes and fools in the early days, though we stood aside to let your people run their vulgar course. It was your hired bully—your respected guardian—this dog of an *espadachin*, who let out a hint of the secret—with a prick of his blade—and a scandal. One of my *peon* women was a servant at the convent when you were a child, and recognised the woman who put you there and came to see you as a friend. She overheard the Mother Superior say it was your mother, and saw a necklace that was left for you to wear. Ah! you begin to believe! When I had put this and that together I found that Pepita could not identify you with the child that she had seen. But you, Señora, you *yourself* supplied the missing proof. Yes! you supplied it with the *necklace* that you wore that evening at Rosario, when you wished to do honour to this young Hathaway—the guardian who had always thrown

you off! Ah! you now suspect why, perhaps! It was your mother's necklace that you wore, and you said so! That night I sent the good Pepita to identify it; to watch through the window from the garden when you were wearing it; to make it sure as the Creed. I sent her to your room late that night when you had changed your dress, that she might examine it among your jewels. And she did—and will swear—look you!—*swear* that it is the one given you as a child by the woman at the convent, who was your mother! And who was that woman—eh? Who was the mother of the Arguello de la Yerba Buena?—who this noble ancestress?"

"Excuse me—but perhaps you are not aware that you are raising your voice in a lady's drawing-room, and that, although you are speaking a language no one here understands, you are disturbing the hotel."

It was Paul, quiet, pale in the moonlight, erect on the balcony before the window. As Yerba, with a start, retreated quickly into the room, Don Cæsar stepped forward angrily and suspiciously towards the window. He had his hand reached forward towards the handle as if to close the swinging sash against the intruder, when in an instant he was seized by Paul, tightly locked in a desperate grip, and whirled out on the balcony. Before he could gain breath to utter a cry, Hathaway had passed his right arm around the Mexican's throat, effectively stopping his utterance, and, with a supreme effort of strength, dragged him along the wall, falling with him into the open window of his own room. As he did so, to his inexpressible relief he heard the sash closed and the bolt drawn of the salon window, and regained his feet, collected, quiet, and triumphant.

"I am sorry," he said, coolly dusting his clothes, "to have been obliged to change the scene of this discussion so roughly, but you will observe that you can speak more

freely *here*, and that any altercation *we* may have in this room will be less likely to attract comment."

"Assassin!" said Don Cæsar chokingly, as he struggled to his feet.

"Thank you. Relieve your feelings as much as you like here; in fact, if you would speak a little louder you would oblige me. The guests are beginning to be awake," continued Paul, with a wicked smile, indicating the noise of an opening door and footsteps in the passage, "and are now able to locate without difficulty the scene of the disturbance."

Briones apparently understood his meaning, and the success of his stratagem. "You think you have saved *her* from disgrace," he said, with a livid smile, in a lower tone and a desperate attempt to imitate Paul's coolness. "For the present—ah—yees! perhaps in this hotel and this evening. But you have not stop my mouth for—a—tomorrow—and the whole world, Mr. Hathaway."

"Well," said Paul, looking at him critically, "I don't know about that. Of course, there's the equal chance that you may kill me—but that's a question for to-morrow, too."

The Mexican cast a quick glance at the door and window. Paul, as if carelessly, changed the key of the former from one pocket to the other, and stepped before the window.

"So this is a plot to murder me. Have a care! You are not in your own brigand California!"

"If you think so, alarm the house. They will find us quarrelling, and you will only precipitate matters by receiving the insult that will make you fight—before them."

"I am r-ready, sir, when and where you will," said Briones, with a swaggering air but a shifting, furtive eye. "Open—a—the door."

"Pardon me. We will leave this room *together* in an hour for the station. We will board the night express that

will take us in three hours beyond the frontier, where we can each find a friend."

"But my affairs here—my sister—I must see her."

"You shall write a note to her at that table, saying that important business—a despatch—has called you away, and we will leave it with the porter to be delivered *in the morning*. Or—I do not restrict you—you can say what you like, provided she don't get it until we have left."

"And you make of me a prisoner, sir?"

"No; a visitor, Don Cæsar—a visitor whose conversation is so interesting that I am forced to detain him to hear more. You can pass the time pleasantly by finishing the story I was obliged to interrupt a moment ago. Do you know this mother of Miss Yerba, of whom you spoke?"

"That's m—my affair."

"That means you don't know her. If you did, you'd have had her within call. And, as she is the only person who is able to say that Miss Yerba is *not* an Arguello, you have been very remiss."

"Ah, bah! I am not one of your—a—lawyers."

"No; or you would know that, with no better evidence than you have, you might be sued for slander."

"Ah! Why does not Miss Yerba sue, then?"

"Because she probably expects that somebody will shoot you."

"As *you*, for instance?"

"Perhaps."

"And if you do *not*—eh? you have not stop my mouth, but your own. And if you *do*, you help her to marry the Baron, your rival. You are not wise, friend Hathaway."

"May I remind you that you have not yet written to your sister, and you may prefer to do it carefully and deliberately!"

Don Cæsar arose, with a vindictive glance at Paul, and

pulled a chair before the table, as the latter placed pen, ink, and paper before him. "Take your time," he added, folding his arms and walking towards the window. "Say what you like, and don't let my presence restrain you."

The Mexican began to write furiously, then spasmodically, then slowly and reluctantly. "I war-r-n you, I shall expose all," he said suddenly.

"As you please."

"And shall say that if I disappear, you are my murderer—you understand—my *murderer*?"

"Don't consult me on a question of epithets, but go on."

Don Cæsar recommenced his writing with a malign smile. There was a sudden sharp rap at the door.

Don Cæsar leaped to his feet, grasped his papers, and rushed to the door; but Paul was before him. "Who is there?" he demanded.

"Pendleton."

At the sound of the Colonel's voice Don Cæsar fell back. Paul opened the door, admitted the tall figure of the Colonel, and was about to turn the key again. But Pendleton lifted his hand in grim deprecation.

"That will do, Mr. Hathaway. I know all. But I wish to speak with Briones elsewhere, alone."

"Excuse me, Colonel Pendleton," said Paul firmly, "but I have the prior claim. Words have passed between this gentleman and myself which we are now on our way to the station and the frontier to settle. If you are willing to accompany us, I shall give you every opportunity to converse with him alone, and arrange whatever business you may have with him, provided it does not interfere with mine."

"My business," said Pendleton, "is of a personal nature, that will not interfere with any claim of yours that Mr. Briones may choose to admit, but is of a private quality that must be transacted between us now." His face was pale,

and his voice, although steady and self-controlled, had that same strange suggestion of sudden age in it which Paul had before noticed. Whether Don Cæsar detected it, or whether he had some other instinctive appreciation of greater security, Paul could not tell. He seemed to recover his swagger again as he said—

“I shall hear what Colonel Pendleton has to say first. But I shall hold myself in readiness to meet you afterwards—you shall not fear, sir!”

Paul remained looking from the one to the other without speaking. It was Don Cæsar who returned his glance boldly and defiantly, Colonel Pendleton who, with thin white fingers pulling his moustache, evaded it. Then Paul unlocked the door, and said slowly, “In five minutes I leave this house for the station. I shall wait there until the train arrives. If this gentleman does not join me, I shall be better able to understand all this and take measures accordingly.”

“And I tell to you, Meester Hathaway, sir,” said Don Cæsar, striking an attitude in the doorway, “you shall do as *I* please—*Caramba!*—and shall beg——”

“Hold your tongue, sir—or, by the Eternal——” burst out Pendleton suddenly, bringing down his thin hand on the Mexican’s shoulder. He stopped as suddenly. “Gentlemen, this is childish. Go, sir!” to Don Cæsar, pointing with a gaunt white finger into the darkened hall. “I will follow you. Mr. Hathaway, as an older man, and one who has seen a good deal of foolish altercation, I regret, sir, deeply regret, to be a witness to this belligerent quality in a law-maker and a public man; and I must deprecate, sir—deprecate your demand on that gentleman for what, in the folly of youth, you are pleased to call personal satisfaction.”

As he moved with dignity out of the room, Paul remained blankly staring after him. Was it all a dream?—or was this Colonel Pendleton, the duellist? Had the old man

gone crazy, or was he merely acting to veil some wild purpose? His sudden arrival showed that Yerba must have sent for him and told him of Don Cæsar's threats: would he be wild enough to attempt to strangle the man in some remote room or in the darkness of the passage? He stepped softly into the hall: he could still hear the double tread of the two men; they had reached the staircase—they were *descending*! He heard the drowsy accents of the night porter and the swinging of the door—they were in the street!

Wherever they were going, or for what purpose, *he* must be at the station, as he had warned them he would be. He hastily threw a few things into his valise, and prepared to follow them. When he went downstairs he informed the porter that owing to an urgent call of business he should try to catch the through express at three o'clock, but they must retain his room and luggage until they heard from him. He remembered Don Cæsar's letter. Had either of the gentlemen, his friends who had just gone out, left a letter or message? No, Excellency; the gentlemen were talking earnestly—he believed, in the South American language—and had not spoken to him.

Perhaps it was this that reminded Paul, as he crossed the square again, that he had made no preparation for any possible fatal issue to himself in this adventure. *She* would know it, however, and why he had undertaken it. He tried to think that perhaps some interest in himself had prompted her to send the Colonel to him. Yet mingled with this was an odd sense of a certain ridiculousness in his position; there was the absurdity of his prospective antagonist being even now in confidential consultation with his own friend and ally, whose functions he had usurped, and in whose interests he was about to risk his life. And as he walked away through the silent streets the conviction more than

once was forced upon him that he was going to an appointment that would not be kept.

He reached the station some ten minutes before the train was due. Two or three half-drowsy, wrapped-up passengers were already on the platform; but neither Don Cæsar nor Colonel Pendleton was among them. He explored the waiting-rooms and even the half-lit buffet, but with no better success. Telling the *Bahnhof Inspector* that his passage was only contingent upon the arrival of one or two companions, and describing them minutely to prevent mistakes, he began gloomily to pace before the ticket-office. Five minutes passed—the number of passengers did not increase; ten minutes; a distant shriek—the hoarse inquiry of the inspector—had the Herr's companions yet *gekommen*? the sudden glare of a Cyclopean eye in the darkness, the on-gliding of the long-jointed and gleaming-spotted serpent, the train—a hurried glance around the platform, one or two guttural orders, the slamming of doors, the remounting of black-uniformed figures like caryatides along the *marchepieds*, a puff of vapour, and the train had come and gone without them.

Yet he would give his adversary fifteen minutes more to allow for accident or delay, or the possible arrival of the Colonel with an explanation, and recommenced his gloomy pacing, as the *Bahnhof* sank back into half-lit repose. At the end of five minutes there was another shriek. Paul turned quickly to the inspector. Ah, then, there was another train? No; it was only the *up express* for Basle, going the other way, and stopping at the *Nord Station*, half a mile away. It would not stop here, but the Herr would see it pass in a few moments at full speed.

It came presently, with a prolonged despairing shriek, out of the darkness; a flash, a rush and roar at his side, a plunge into the darkness again with the same despairing cry; a

flutter of something white from one of the windows, like a loosened curtain, that at last seemed to detach itself, and, after a wild attempt to follow, suddenly soared aloft, whirled over and over, dropped, and drifted slowly, slantwise, to the ground.

The inspector had seen it, ran down the line, and picked it up. Then he returned with it to Paul with a look of sympathising concern. It was a lady's handkerchief, evidently some signal waved to the well-born Herr, who was the only passenger on the platform. So, possibly, it might be from his friends, who by some stupid mischance had gone to the wrong station, and—*Gott im Himmel!*—it was hideously stupid, yet possible, got on the wrong train!

The Herr, a little pale, but composed, thought it *was* possible. No; he would not telegraph to the next station—not yet—he would inquire.

He walked quickly away, reaching the hotel breathlessly, yet in a space that seemed all too brief for his disconnected thought. There were signs of animation in the hall, and an empty carriage was just re-entering the courtyard. The hall-porter met him with demonstrative concern and apology. Ah! if he had only understood his Excellency better, he could have saved him all this trouble. Evidently his Excellency was going with the Arguello party, who had ordered a carriage, doubtless for the same important journey, an hour before, yet had left only a few moments after his Excellency. And his Excellency, it would appear, had gone to the wrong station.

Paul pushed hurriedly past the man and ascended to his room. Both windows were open, and in the faint moonlight he could see that something white was pinned to his pillow. With nervous fingers he relit his candles, and found it was a note in Yerba's handwriting. As he opened it, a tiny spray of the vine that had grown on the crumbling wall

fell at his feet. He picked it up, pressed it to his lips, and read, with dim eyes, as follows :—

“You know now why I spoke to you as I did to-day, and why the other half of this precious spray is the only memory I care to carry with me out of this crumbling ruin of all my hopes. You were right, Paul : my taking you there *was an omen*—not to you, who can never be anything but proud, beloved, and true—but to *me* of all this shame and misery. Thank you for all you have done—for all you would do, my friend, and don’t think me ungrateful, only because I am unworthy of it. Try to forgive me, but don’t forget me, even if you must hate me. Perhaps, if you knew all—you might still love a little the poor girl to whom you have already given the only name she can ever take from you—YERBA BUENA !”

CHAPTER VII.

It was already autumn, and in the city of New York an early Sunday morning breeze was sweeping up the leaves that had fallen from the regularly planted aیلanthus trees before the brown-stone frontage of a row of monotonously alike five-storeyed houses on one of the principal avenues. The Pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church, that uplifted its double towers on the corner, stopped before one of these dwellings, ran up the dozen broad steps, and rang the bell. He was presently admitted to the sombre richness of a hall and drawing-room with high-backed furniture of dark carved wood, like cathedral stalls, and, hat in hand, somewhat impatiently awaited the arrival of his hostess and parishioner. The door opened to a tall, white-haired woman in lustreless black silk. She was regular and resolute in features, of fine

but unbending presence, and, though somewhat past middle age, showed no signs of either the weakness or mellowness of years.

"I am sorry to disturb your Sabbath morning meditations, Sister Argalls, nor would I if it were not in the line of Christian duty; but Sister Robbins is unable to-day to make her usual Sabbath hospital visit, and I thought if you were excused from the Foreign Missionary class and Bible instruction at three you might undertake her functions. I know, my dear old friend," he continued, with bland deprecation of her hard-set eyes, "how distasteful this promiscuous mingling with the rough and ungodly has always been to you, and how reluctant you are to be placed in the position of being liable to hear coarse, vulgar, or irreverent speech. I think, too, in our long and pleasant pastoral relations, you have always found me mindful of it. I admit I have sometimes regretted that your late husband had not more generally familiarised you with the ways of the world. But so it is—we all have our weaknesses. If not one thing, another. And as envy and uncharitableness sometimes find their way in even Christian hearts, I should like you to undertake this office for the sake of example. There are some, dear Sister Argalls, who think that the rich widow who is most liberal in the endowment of the goods that Providence has entrusted to her hands claims therefore to be exempt from labour in the Christian vineyard. Let us teach them how unjust they are."

"I am willing," said the lady, with a dry, determined air. "I suppose these patients are not professedly bad characters?"

"By no means. A few, perhaps; but the majority are unfortunates—dependent either upon public charity or some small provision made by their friends."

"Very well."

"And you understand that, though they have the privilege of rejecting your Christian ministrations, dear Sister Argalls, you are free to judge when you may be patient or importunate with them."

"I understand."

The Pastor was not an unkindly man, and, as he glanced at the uncompromising look in Mrs. Argalls' eyes, felt for a moment some inconsistency between his humane instincts and his Christian duty. "Some of them may require, and be benefited by, a stern monitress, and Sister Robbins, I fear, was weak," he said consolingly to himself, as he descended the steps again.

At three o'clock Mrs. Argalls, with a reticule and a few tracts, was at the door of St. John's Hospital. As she displayed her testimonials and announced that she had taken Mrs. Robbins' place, the officials received her respectfully, and gave some instructions to the attendants, which, however, did not stop some individual comments.

"I say, Jim, it doesn't seem the square thing to let that grim old girl loose among them poor convalescents."

"Well, I don't know : they say she's rich and gives a lot o' money away, but if she tackles that swearing old Kentuckian in No. 3, she'll have her hands full."

However, the criticism was scarcely fair, for Mrs. Argalls, although moving rigidly along from bed to bed of the ward, equipped with a certain formula of phrases, nevertheless dropped from time to time some practical common-sense questions that showed an almost masculine intuition of the patients' needs and requirements. Nor did she betray any of that over-sensitive shrinking from coarseness which the good Pastor had feared, albeit she was quick to correct its exhibition. The languid men listened to her with half-aggressive, half-amused interest, and some of the satisfaction of taking a bitter but wholesome tonic. It was not until

she reached the bed at the farther end of the ward that she seemed to meet with any check.

It was occupied by a haggard man, with a long white moustache and features that seemed wasted by inward struggle and fever. At the first sound of her voice he turned quickly towards her, lifted himself on his elbow, and gazed fixedly in her face.

"Kate Howard—by the Eternal!" he said, in a low voice.

Despite her rigid self-possession the woman started, glanced hurriedly around, and drew nearer to him.

"Pendleton!" she said, in an equally suppressed voice. "What, in God's name, are you doing here?"

"Dying, I reckon—sooner or later," he said grimly; "that's what they do here."

"But—what," she went on hurriedly, still glancing over her shoulder as if she suspected some trick—"what has brought you to this?"

"*You!*" said the Colonel, dropping back exhaustedly on his pillow. "You and your daughter."

"I don't understand you," she said quickly, yet regarding him with stern rigidity. "You know perfectly well I have *no* daughter. You know perfectly well that I've kept the word I gave you ten years ago, and that I have been dead to her as she has been to me."

"I know," said the Colonel, "that within the last three months I have paid away my last cent to keep the mouth of an infernal scoundrel shut who *knows* that you are her mother, and threatens to expose her to her friends. I know that I'm dying here of an old wound that I got when I shut the mouth of another hound who was ready to bark at her two years after you disappeared. I know that between you and her I've let my old nigger die of a broken heart, because I couldn't keep him to suffer with me, and I know that I'm

here a pauper on the State. I know that, Kate, and when I say it I don't regret it. I've kept my word to *you*, and, by the Eternal, your daughter's worth it! For if there ever was a fair and peerless creature—it's your child!"

"And she—a rich woman—unless she squandered the fortune I gave her—lets you lie here!" said the woman grimly.

"She don't know it."

"She *should* know it! Have you quarrelled?" She was looking at him keenly.

"She distrusts me, because she half suspects the secret, and I hadn't the heart to tell her all."

"All? What does she know? What does this man know? What has been told her?" she said rapidly.

"She only knows that the name she has taken she has no right to."

"Right to? Why, it was written on the Trust—Yerba Buena."

"No, not that. She thought it was a mistake. She took the name of Arguello."

"What?" said Mrs. Argalls, suddenly grasping the invalid's wrist with both hands. "What name?" Her eyes were startled from their rigid coldness, her lips were colourless.

"Arguello! It was some foolish schoolgirl fancy which that hound helped to foster in her. Why—what's the matter, Kate?"

The woman dropped the helpless man's wrist, then, with an effort, recovered herself sufficiently to rise, and with an air of increased decorum, as if the spiritual character of their interview excluded worldly intrusion, adjusted the screen around his bed, so as partly to hide her own face and Pendleton's. Then, dropping into the chair beside him, she said in her old voice, from which the burden of ten long years seemed to have been lifted.

"Harry, what's that you're playing on me?"

"I don't understand you," said Pendleton amazedly.

"Do you mean to say you don't know it, and didn't tell her yourself?" she said curtly.

"What? Tell her what?" he repeated impatiently.

"That Arguello *was* her father!"

"Her father?" He tried to struggle to his elbow again, but she laid her hand masterfully upon his shoulder and forced him back. "Her father!" he repeated hurriedly. "José Arguello! Great God!—are you sure?"

Quietly and yet mechanically gathering the scattered tracts from the coverlet, and putting them back one by one in her reticule, she closed it and her lips with a snap as she uttered "Yes."

Pendleton remained staring at her silently. "Yes," he muttered; "it may have been some instinct of the child's, or some diabolical fancy of Briones'. But," he said bitterly, "true or not, she has no right to his name."

"And I say she *has*."

She had risen to her feet, with her arms folded across her breast, in an attitude of such Puritan composure that the distant spectators might have thought she was delivering an exordium to the prostrate man.

"I met José Arguello, for the second time, in New Orleans," she said slowly, "eight years ago. He was still rich, but ruined in health by dissipation. I was tired of my way of life. He proposed that I should marry him to take care of him and legitimatise our child. I was forced to tell him what I had done with her, and that the Trust could not be disturbed until she was of age and her own mistress. He assented. We married, but he died within a year. He died, leaving with me his acknowledgment of her as his child, and the right to claim her if I chose."

"And?" interrupted the Colonel with sparkling eyes.

"I don't choose."

"Hear me!" she continued firmly. "With his name and my own mistress, and the girl, as I believed, properly provided for and ignorant of my existence, I saw no necessity for re-opening the past. I resolved to lead a new life as his widow. I came North. In the little New England town where I first stopped the country people contracted my name to Mrs. Argalls. I let it stand so. I came to New York and entered the service of the Lord and the bonds of the Church, Henry Pendleton, as Mrs. Argalls, and have remained so ever since."

"But you would not object to Yerba knowing that you lived, and rightly bore her father's name?" said Pendleton eagerly.

The woman looked at him with compressed lips. "I should. I have buried all my past and all its consequences. Let me not seek to reopen it or recall them."

"But if you knew that she was as proud as yourself, and that this very uncertainty as to her name and parentage, although she has never known the whole truth, kept her from taking the name and becoming the wife of a man whom she loves?"

"Whom she loves!"

"Yes; one of her guardians—Hathaway—to whom you entrusted her when she was a child."

"Paul Hathaway—but *he* knew it."

"Yes. But *she* does not know he does. He has kept the secret faithfully even when she refused him."

She was silent for a moment, and then said—

"So be it. I consent."

"And you'll write to her?" said the Colonel eagerly.

"No. But *you* may, and if you want them I will furnish you with such proofs as you may require."

"Thank you." He held out his hand with such a happy, yet childish gratitude upon his worn face, that her own trembled slightly as she took it. "Good-bye!"

"I shall see you soon," she said.

"I shall be here," he said grimly.

"I think not," she returned, with the first relaxation of her smileless face, and moved away.

As she passed out she asked to see the house surgeon. How soon did he think the patient she had been conversing with could be removed from the hospital with safety? Did Mrs. Argalls mean "far"? Mrs. Argalls meant as far as *that*—tendering her card and eminently respectable address. Ah!—perhaps in a week. Not before? Perhaps before, unless complications ensued; the patient had been much run down physically, though, as Mrs. Argalls had probably noticed, he was singularly strong in nervous will force. Mrs. Argalls *had* noticed it, and considered it an extraordinary case of conviction—worthy of the closest watching and care. When he was able to be moved she would send her own carriage and her own physician to superintend his transfer. In the meantime he was to want for nothing. Certainly, he had given very little trouble, and, in fact, wanted very little. Just now he had only asked for paper, pens, and ink.

CHAPTER VIII.

As Mrs. Argalls' carriage rolled into Fifth Avenue, it for a moment narrowly grazed another carriage, loaded with luggage, driving up to an hotel. The abstracted traveller within it was Paul Hathaway, who had returned from Europe that morning.

Paul entered the hotel, and, going to the register mechanically, turned its leaves for the previous arrivals, with the same hopeless patience that had for the last six weeks accompanied this habitual preliminary performance on his arrival at the principal European hotels. For he had lost all trace

of Yerba, Pendleton, Milly, and the Briones from the day of their departure. The entire party seemed to have separated at Basle; and, in that eight-hours start they had of him, to have disappeared to the four cardinal points. He had lingered a few days in London to transact some business; he would linger a few days longer in New York before returning to San Francisco.

The daily papers already contained his name in the list of the steamer passengers who arrived that morning. It might meet *her* eye, although he had been haunted during the voyage by a terrible fancy that she was still in Europe, and had either hidden herself in some obscure provincial town with the half-crazy Pendleton, or had entered a convent, or even, in reckless despair, had accepted the name and title of some penniless nobleman. It was this miserable doubt that had made his homeward journey at times seem like a cruel desertion of her, while at other moments the conviction that Milly's Californian relatives might give him some clue to her whereabouts made him feverishly fearful of delaying an hour on his way to San Francisco. He did not believe that she had tolerated the company of Briones a single moment after the scene at the Bad Hof, and yet he had no confidence in the Colonel's attitude towards the Mexican. Hopeless of the future as her letter seemed, still its naïve and tacit confession of her feelings at the moment was all that sustained him.

Two days passed, and he still lingered aimlessly in New York. In two days more the Panama steamer would sail—yet in his hesitation he had put off securing his passage. He visited the offices of the different European steamer lines, and examined the recent passenger lists, but there was no record of any of the party. What made his quest seem the more hopeless was his belief that, after Briones' revelation, she had cast off the name of Arguello and taken some other.

She might even be in New York under that new name now.

On the morning of the third day, among his letters was one that bore the postmark of a noted suburban settlement of wealthy villa-owners on the Hudson River. It was from Milly Woods, stating that her father had read of his arrival in the papers, and begged he would dine and stay the next night with them at "Under Cliff," if he "still had any interest in the fortunes of old friends. Of course," added the perennially incoherent Milly, "if it bores you we shan't expect you." The quick colour came to Paul's careworn cheek. He telegraphed assent, and at sunset that afternoon stepped off the train at a little private woodland station—so abnormally rustic and picturesque, in its brown-bark walls covered with scarlet Virginia creepers, that it looked like a theatrical erection.

Mr. Woods's station waggon was in waiting, but Paul, handing the driver his valise, and ascertaining the general direction of the house, and that it was not far distant, told him to go on and he would follow afoot. The tremor of vague anticipation had already come upon him; something that he knew not whether he feared or longed for, only that it was inevitable, had begun to possess him. He would soon recover himself in the flaring glory of this woodland, and the invigoration of this hale October air.

It was a beautiful and brilliant sunset, yet not so beautiful and brilliant but that the whole opulent forest around him seemed to challenge and repeat its richest as well as its most delicate dyes. The reddening west, seen through an opening of scarlet maples, was no longer red; the golden glory of the sun, sinking over a promontory of gleaming yellow sumach that jutted out into the noble river, was shorn of its intense radiance; at times in the thickest woods he seemed surrounded by a yellow nimbus; at times so luminous was

the glow of these translucent leaves that the position of the sun itself seemed changed, or the shadows cast in defiance of its glory. As he walked on, long reaches of the lordly placid stream at his side were visible, as far as the terraces of the opposite shore, lifted on basaltic columns, themselves streaked and veined with gold and fire. Paul had seen nothing like this since his boyhood; for an instant the great heroics of the Sierran landscape were forgotten in this magnificent harlequinade.

A dim footpath crossed the road in the direction of the house, which for the last few moments had been slowly etching itself as a soft vignette in a tinted aureole of walnut and maple upon the steel blue of the river. He was hesitating whether to take this short cut or continue on by the road, when he heard the rustling of quick footsteps among the fallen leaves of the variegated thicket through which it stole. He stopped short, the leafy screen shivered and parted, and a tall graceful figure, like a draped and hidden Columbine, burst through its painted foliage. It was Yerba!

She ran quickly towards him, with parted lips, shining eyes, and a few scarlet leaves clinging to the stuff of her worsted dress in a way that recalled the pink petals of Rosario.

"When I saw you were not in the waggon and knew you were walking, I slipped out to intercept you, as I had something to tell you before you saw the others. I thought you wouldn't mind." She stopped, and suddenly hesitated.

What was this new strange shyness that seemed to droop her eyelids, her proud head, and even the slim hand that had been so impulsively and frankly outstretched towards him? And he—Paul—what was he doing? Where was this passionate outburst that had filled his heart for nights and days? Where this eager, tumultuous questioning that his feverish lips had rehearsed hour by hour? Where this desperate courage that would sweep the whole world away

if it stood between them? Where, indeed? He was standing only a few feet from her—cold, silent, and tremulous!

She drew back a step, lifted her head with a quick toss that seemed to condense the moisture in her shining eyes, and sent what might have been a glittering dewdrop flying into the loosed tendrils of her hair. Calm and erect again, she put her little hand to her jacket pocket.

"I only wanted you to read a letter I got yesterday," she said, taking out an envelope.

The spell was broken. Paul caught eagerly at the hand that held the letter, and would have drawn her to him; but she put him aside gravely but sweetly.

"Read that letter!"

"Tell me of *yourself* first!" he broke out passionately. "Why you fled from me, and why I now find you here, by the merest chance, without a word of summons from yourself, Yerba? Tell me who is with you? Are you free and your own mistress—free to act for yourself and me? Speak, darling—don't be cruel! Since that night I have longed for you, sought for you, and suffered for you every day and hour. Tell me if I find you the same Yerba who wrote——"

"Read that letter!"

"I care for none but the one you left me. I have read and re-read it, Yerba—carried it always with me. See! I have it here!" He was in the act of withdrawing it from his breast-pocket, when she put up her hand piteously.

"Please, Paul, please—read this letter first!"

There was something in her new supplicating grace, still retaining the faintest suggestion of her old girlish archness, that struck him. He took the letter and opened it. It was from Colonel Pendleton.

Plainly, concisely, and formally, without giving the name of his authority or suggesting his interview with Mrs. Argalls, he had informed Yerba that he had documentary testimony

that she was the daughter of the late José de Arguelio, and legally entitled to bear his name. A copy of the instructions given to his wife, recognising Yerba Buena, the ward of the San Francisco Trust, as his child and hers, and leaving to the mother the choice of making it known to her and others, was enclosed.

Paul turned an unchanged face upon Yerba, who was watching him eagerly, uneasily, almost breathlessly.

"And you think this concerns *me*!" he said bitterly. "You think only of this, when I speak of the precious letter that bade me hope, and brought me to you?"

"Paul," said the girl, with wondering eyes and hesitating lips; "do you mean to say that—that—this is—nothing to you?"

"Yes—but forgive me, darling!" he broke out again, with a sudden vague remorsefulness, as he once more sought her elusive hand. "I am a brute—an egotist! I forgot that it might be something to *you*."

"Paul," continued the girl, her voice quivering with a strange joy, "do you say that you—*you* yourself, care nothing for this?"

"Nothing," he answered, gazing at her transfigured face with admiring wonder.

"And"—more timidly, as a faint aurora kindled in her cheeks—"that you don't care—that—that—I am coming to you *with a name* to give you in—exchange?"

He started.

"Yerba, you are not mocking me? You will be my wife?"

She smiled, yet moving softly backwards with the grave stateliness of a vanishing yet beckoning goddess, until she reached the sumach-bush from which she had emerged. He followed. Another backward step, and it yielded to let her through; but even as it did so she caught him in her arms

and for a single moment it closed upon them both, and hid them in its glory. A still lingering song-bird, possibly convinced that he had mistaken the season, and that spring had really come, flew out with a little cry to carry the message south ; but even then Paul and Yerba emerged with such innocent, childlike gravity, and side by side walked so composedly towards the house, that he thought better of it.

CHAPTER IX.

It was only the *third* time they had ever met—did Paul consider that when he thought her cold? Did he know now why she had not understood him at Rosario? Did he understand now how calculating and selfish he had seemed to her that night? Could he look her in the face now—no, he must be quiet—they were so near the house, and everybody could see them!—and say that he had ever believed her capable of making up that story of the Arguellos? Could he not have guessed that she had some memory of that name in her childish recollections, how or where she knew not? Was it strange that a daughter should have an instinct of her father? Was it kind to her to know all this himself and yet reveal nothing? Because her mother and father had quarrelled, and her mother had run away with somebody and left her a ward to strangers—was that to be concealed from her, and she left without a name? This, and much more, tenderly reproachful, bewildering and sweetly illogical, yet inexpressibly dear to Paul as they walked on in the gloaming.

More to the purpose, however, the fact that Briones, as far as she knew, did not know her mother, and never before the night at Strudle Bad had ever spoken of her. Still more to the purpose, that he had disappeared after an interview with the Colonel that night, and that she believed always

that the Colonel had bought him off. It was not with *her* money. She had sometimes thought that the Colonel and he were in confidence, and that was why she had lately distrusted Pendleton. But she had refused to take the name of Arguello again after that scene, and had called herself only by the name he had given her—would he forgive her for ever speaking of it as she had?—Yerba Buena. But on ship-board, at Milly's suggestion, and to keep away from Briones, her name had appeared on the passenger list as Miss Good, and they had come, not to New York, but Boston.

It was possible that the Colonel had extracted the information he sent her *from* Briones. They had parted from Pendleton in London, as he was grumpy and queer, and, as Milly thought, becoming very miserly and avaricious as he grew older, for he was always quarrelling over the hotel bills. But he had Mrs. Woods's New York address at Under Cliff, and, of course, guessed where she was. There was no address on his letter; he had said he would write again.

Thus much until they reached the steps of the verandah, and Milly, flying down, was ostentatiously overwhelmed with the unexpected appearance of Mr. Paul Hathaway and Yerba, whom she had been watching from the window for the last ten minutes. Then the appearance of Mr. Woods, Californian and reminiscent, and Mrs. Woods, metropolitan, languid, and forgetful, and the sudden and formal retirement of the girls. An arch and indefinable mystery in the air whenever Paul and Yerba appeared together—of which even the servants were discreetly conscious.

At dinner Mr. Woods again became retrospective and Californian, and dwelt upon the changes he had noticed. It appeared the old pioneers had in few cases attained a comfortable fortune for their old age. "I know," he added, "that your friend Colonel Pendleton has dropped a good deal of money over in Europe. Somebody told me that he

actually was reduced to take a steerage passage home. It looks as if he might gamble—it's an old Californian complaint." As Paul, who had become suddenly grave again, did not speak, Mrs. Woods reminded them that she had always doubted the Colonel's moral principles. Old as he was, he had never got over that freedom of life and social opinion which he had imbibed in early days. For her part, she was very glad that he had not returned from Europe with the girls, though, of course, the presence of Don Cæsar and his sister during their European sojourn was a corrective. As Paul's face grew darker during this languid criticism, Yerba, who had been watching it with a new and absorbing sympathy, seized the first moment when they left the table to interrogate him with heart-breaking eyes.

"You don't think, Paul, that the Colonel is really poor?"

"God only knows," said Paul. "I tremble to think how that scoundrel may have bled him."

"And all for me! Paul, dear, you know you were saying in the woods that you would never, never touch my money. What"—exultingly—"if we gave it to him?"

What answer Paul made did not transpire, for it seemed to have been indicated by an interval of profound silence.

But the next morning, as he and Mr. Woods were closeted in the library, Yerba broke in upon them with a pathetic face and a telegram in her hand. "Oh, Paul—Mr. Hathaway—*it's true!*"

Paul seized the telegram quickly; it had no signature, only the line: "Colonel Pendleton is dangerously ill at St. John's Hospital."

"I must go at once," said Paul, rising.

"Oh, Paul"—imploringly—"let me go with you! I should never forgive myself if—and *it's addressed to me*; and what would he think if I didn't come?"

Paul hesitated. "Mrs. Woods will let Milly go with us

—and she can stay at the hotel. Say yes,” she continued, seeking his eyes eagerly.

He consented, and in half an hour they were in the train for New York. Leaving Milly at the hotel, ostensibly in deference to the Woods’s prejudices, but really to save the presence of a third party at this meeting, Paul drove with Yerba rapidly to the hospital. They were admitted to an anteroom. The house surgeon received them respectfully, but doubtingly. The patient was a little better this morning, but very weak. There was a lady now with him—a member of a religious and charitable guild, who had taken the greatest interest in him—indeed, she had wished to take him to her own home—but he had declined at first, and now he was too weak to be removed.

“But I received this telegram; it must have been sent at his request,” protested Yerba.

The house surgeon looked at the beautiful face. He was mortal. He would see if the patient was able to stand another interview; possibly the regular visitor might withdraw.

When he had gone, an attendant volunteered the information that the old gentleman was perhaps a little excited at times. He was a wonderful man; he had seen a great deal; he talked much of California and the early days; he was very interesting. Ah, it would be all right now if the doctor found him well enough, for the lady was already going—that was she coming through the hall.

She came slowly towards them—erect, grey, grim—a still handsome apparition. Paul started. To his horror, Yerba ran impulsively forward and said eagerly, “Is he better? Can he see us now?”

The woman halted an instant, seemed to gather the prayer-book and reticule she was carrying closer to her breast, but was otherwise unchanged. Replying to Paul rather than the young girl, she said rigidly, “The patient

is able to see Mr. Hathaway and Miss Yerba Buena," and passed slowly on. But as she reached the door she unloosed her black mourning veil from her bonnet, and seemed to drop it across her face with a gesture that Paul remembered she had used twelve years ago.

"She frightens me!" said Yerba, turning a suddenly startled face on Paul. "Oh, Paul, I hope it isn't an omen, but she looked like some one from the grave!"

"Hush!" said Paul, turning away a face that was whiter than her own. "They are coming now."

The house surgeon had returned a trifle graver. They might see him now, but they must be warned that he wandered at times a little; and, if he might suggest, if it was anything of family importance, they had better make the most of their time and his lucid intervals. Perhaps, if they were old friends—*very* old friends—he would recognise them. He was wandering much in the past—always in the past.

They found him in the end of the ward, but so carefully protected and partitioned off by screens that the space around his cot had all the privacy and security of an apartment. He was very much changed; they would scarcely have known him but for the delicately curved aquiline profile and the long white moustache—now so faint and etherealised as to seem a mere spirit wing that rested on his pillow. To their surprise he opened his eyes with a smile of perfect recognition, and with thin fingers beyond the coverlid beckoned to them to approach. Yet there was still a shadow of his old reserve in his reception of Paul, and, although one hand interlocked the fingers of Yerba—who had at first rushed impulsively forward and fallen on her knees beside the bed—and the other softly placed itself upon her head, his eyes were fixed upon the young man's with the ceremoniousness due to a stranger.

"I am glad to see, sir," he began in a slow, broken, but per-

fectly audible voice, "that now you are—satisfied with the right—of this young lady—to bear the name of—Arguelio—and her relationship—sir—to one of the oldest——"

"But, my dear old friend," broke out Paul earnestly, "I *never* cared for that—I beg you to believe——"

"He never—never—cared for it—dear, dear Colonel," sobbed Yerba passionately; "it was all my fault—he thought only of me—you wrong him!"

"I think otherwise," said the Colonel, with grim and relentless deliberation. "I have a vivid—impression—sir—of an—interview I had with you—at the St. Charles—where you said——" He was silent for a moment, and then in a quite different voice called faintly—

"George!"

Paul and Yerba glanced quickly at each other.

"George, set out some refreshment for the Honourable Paul Hathaway. The best, sir—you understand. . . . A good nigger, sir—a good boy; and he never leaves me, sir. Only, by gad! sir, he will starve himself and his family to be with me. I brought him with me to California away back in the fall of forty-nine. Those were the early days, sir—the early days."

His head had fallen back quite easily on the pillow now; but a slight film seemed to be closing over his dark eyes, like the inner lid of an eagle when it gazes upon the sun.

"They were the old days, sir—the days of Men—when a man's *word* was enough for anything, and his trigger-finger settled any doubt. When the Trust that he took from Man, Woman, or Child was never broken. When the tide, sir, that swept through the Golden Gate came up as far as Montgomery Street."

He did not speak again. But they who stood beside him knew that the tide had once more come up to Montgomery Street, and was carrying Harry Pendleton away with it.

A Sappho of Green Springs.

CHAPTER I.

"COME in," said the editor.

The door of the editorial room of the *Excelsior Magazine* began to creak painfully under the hesitating pressure of an uncertain and unfamiliar hand. This continued until with a start of irritation the editor faced directly about, throwing his leg over the arm of his chair with a certain youthful dexterity. With one hand gripping its back, the other still grasping a proof-slip, and his pencil in his mouth, he stared at the intruder.

The stranger, despite his hesitating entrance, did not seem in the least disconcerted. He was a tall man, looking even taller by reason of the long formless overcoat he wore, known as a "duster," and by a long straight beard that depended from his chin, which he combed with two reflective fingers as he contemplated the editor. The red dust which still lay in the creases of his garment and in the curves of his soft felt hat, and left a dusty circle like a precipitated halo around his feet, proclaimed him, if not a countryman, a recent inland importation by coach. "Busy?" he said, in a grave but pleasant voice. "I kin wait. Don't mind *me*. Go on."

The editor indicated a chair with his disengaged hand and plunged again into his proof-slips. The stranger surveyed the scant furniture and appointments of the office with a

look of grave curiosity, and then, taking a chair, fixed an earnest, penetrating gaze on the editor's profile. The editor felt it, and, without looking up, said—

“Well, go on.”

“But you're busy. I kin wait.”

“I shall not be less busy this morning. I can listen.”

“I want you to give me the name of a certain person who writes in your magazine.”

The editor's eye glanced at the second right-hand drawer of his desk. It did not contain the names of his contributors, but what in the traditions of his office was accepted as an equivalent—a revolver. He had never yet presented either to an inquirer. But he laid aside his proofs, and, with a slight darkening of his youthful, discontented face, said, “What do you want to know for?”

The question was so evidently unexpected that the stranger's face coloured slightly, and he hesitated. The editor meanwhile, without taking his eyes from the man, mentally ran over the contents of the last magazine. They had been of a singularly peaceful character. There seemed to be nothing to justify homicide on his part or the stranger's. Yet there was no knowing, and his questioner's bucolic appearance by no means precluded an assault. Indeed, it had been a legend of the office that a predecessor had suffered vicariously from a geological hammer covertly introduced into a scientific controversy by an irate professor.

“As we make ourselves responsible for the conduct of the magazine,” continued the young editor, with mature severity, “we do not give up the names of our contributors. If you do not agree with their opinions——”

“But I *do*,” said the stranger, with his former composure; “and I reckon that's why I want to know who wrote those verses called ‘Underbrush,’ signed ‘White Violet,’ in your last number. They're pow'ful pretty.”

The editor flushed slightly, and glanced instinctively around for any unexpected witness of his ludicrous mistake. The fear of ridicule was uppermost in his mind, and he was more relieved at his mistake not being overheard than at its groundlessness.

"The verses *are* pretty," he said, recovering himself, with a critical air, "and I am glad you like them. But even then, you know, I could not give you the lady's name without her permission. I will write to her and ask it, if you like."

The actual fact was that the verses had been sent to him anonymously from a remote village in the Coast Range—the address being the post-office and the signature initials.

The stranger looked disturbed. "Then she ain't about here anywhere?" he said, with a vague gesture. "She don't belong to the office?"

The young editor beamed with tolerant superiority: "No, I am sorry to say."

"I should like to have got to see her and kinder asked her a few questions," continued the stranger, with the same reflective seriousness. "You see, it wasn't just the rhymin' o' them verses—and they kinder sing themselves to ye, don't they?—it wasn't the chyce o' words—and I reckon they allus hit the idee in the centre shot every time—it wasn't the idees and moral she sort o' drew out o' what she was tellin'—but it was the straight thing itself—the truth?"

"The truth?" repeated the editor.

"Yes, sir. I've bin there. I've seen all that she's seen in the brush—the little flicks and checkers o' light and shadder down in the brown dust that you wonder how it ever got through the dark of the woods, and that allus seems to slip away like a snake or a lizard if you grope. I've heard all that she's heard there—the creepin', the sighin', and the whisperin' through the bracken and the ground-vines of all that lives there."

"You seem to be a poet yourself," said the editor, with a patronising smile.

"I'm a lumberman, up in Mendocino," returned the stranger, with sublime *naïveté*. "Got a mill there. You see, sightin' standin' timber and selectin' from the gen'ral show of the trees in the ground and the lay of roots hez sorter made me take notice." He paused. "Then," he added, somewhat despondingly, "you don't know who she is?"

"No," said the editor reflectively; "not even if it is really a *woman* who writes."

"Eh?"

"Well, you see, 'White Violet' may as well be the *nom-de-plume* of a man as of a woman—especially if adopted for the purpose of mystification. The handwriting, I remember, was more boyish than feminine."

"No," returned the stranger doggedly, "it wasn't no *man*. There's ideas and words there that only come from a woman; baby-talk to the birds, you know, and a kind of fearsome keer of bugs and creepin' things that don't come to a man who wears boots and trousers. Well," he added, with a return to his previous air of resigned disappointment, "I suppose you don't even know what she's like?"

"No," responded the editor cheerfully. Then, following an idea suggested by the odd mingling of sentiment and shrewd perception in the man before him, he added, "Probably not at all like anything you imagine. She may be a mother with three or four children; or an old maid who keeps a boarding-house; or a wrinkled schoolmistress; or a chit of a schoolgirl. I've had some fair verses from a red-haired girl of fourteen at the Seminary," he concluded, with professional coolness.

The stranger regarded him with the *naïve* wonder of an inexperienced man. Having paid this tribute to his superior

knowledge, he regained his previous air of grave perception. "I reckon she ain't none of them. But I'm keepin' you from your work. Good-bye. My name's Bowers—Jim Bowers, of Mendocino. If you're up my way, give me a call. And if you do write to this yer 'White Violet,' and she's willin', send me her address."

He shook the editor's hand warmly—even in its literal significance of imparting a good deal of his own earnest caloric to the editor's fingers—and left the room. His foot-fall echoed along the passage and died out, and with it, I fear, all impression of his visit from the editor's mind, as he plunged again into the silent task before him.

Presently he was conscious of a melodious humming and a light leisurely step at the entrance of the hall. They continued on in an easy harmony and unaffected as the passage of a bird. Both were pleasant and both familiar to the editor. They belonged to Jack Hamlin, by vocation a gambler, by taste a musician, on his way from his apartments on the upper floor, where he had just risen, to drop into his friend's editorial room and glance over the exchanges, as was his habit before breakfast.

The door opened lightly. The editor was conscious of a faint odour of scented soap, a sensation of freshness and cleanliness, the impression of a soft hand like a woman's on his shoulder, and, like a woman's, momentarily and playfully caressing, the passage of a graceful shadow across his desk, and the next moment Jack Hamlin was ostentatiously dusting a chair with an open newspaper preparatory to sitting down.

"You ought to ship that office-boy of yours if he can't keep things cleaner," he said, suspending his melody to eye grimly the dust which Mr. Bowers had shaken from his departing feet.

The editor did not look up until he had finished revising

a difficult paragraph. By that time Mr. Hamlin had comfortably settled himself on a cane sofa, and, possibly out of deference to his surroundings, had subdued his song to a peculiarly low, soft, and heart-breaking whistle as he unfolded a newspaper. Clean and faultless in his appearance, he had the rare gift of being able to get up at two in the afternoon with much of the dewy freshness and all of the moral superiority of an early riser.

"You ought to have been here just now, Jack," said the editor.

"Not a row, old man, eh?" inquired Jack, with a faint accession of interest.

"No," said the editor, smiling. Then he related the incidents of the previous interview, with a certain humorous exaggeration which was part of his nature. But Jack did not smile.

"You ought to have booted him out of the ranch on sight," he said. "What right had he to come here prying into a lady's affairs?—at least a lady as far as *he* knows. Of course she's some old blowzy with frumpled hair trying to rope in a greenhorn with a string of words and phrases," concluded Jack carelessly, who had an equally cynical distrust of the sex and of literature.

"That's about what I told him," said the editor.

"That's just what you *shouldn't* have told him," returned Jack. "You ought to have stuck up for that woman as if she'd been your own mother. Lord! you fellows don't know how to run a magazine. You ought to let *me* sit on that chair and tackle your customers."

"What would you have done, Jack?" asked the editor, much amused to find that his hitherto invincible hero was not above the ordinary human weakness of offering advice as to editorial conduct.

"Done?" reflected Jack. "Well, first, sonny, I shouldn't

keep a revolver in a drawer that I had to *open* to get at."

"But what would you have said?"

"I should simply have asked him what was the price of lumber at Mendocino," said Jack sweetly, "and when he told me, I should have said that the samples he was offering out of his own head wouldn't suit. You see, you don't want any trifling in such matters. You write well enough, my boy," continued he, turning over his paper, "but what you're lacking in is editorial dignity. But go on with your work. Don't mind me."

Thus admonished, the editor again bent over his desk, and his friend softly took up his suspended song. The editor had not proceeded far in his corrections when Jack's voice again broke the silence.

"Where are those d——d verses, anyway?"

Without looking up, the editor waved his pencil towards an uncut copy of the *Excelsior Magazine* lying on the table.

"You don't suppose I'm going to *read* them, do you?" said Jack aggrievedly. "Why don't you say what they're about? That's your business as editor."

But that functionary, now wholly lost and wandering in the *non-sequitur* of an involved passage in the proof before him, only waved an impatient remonstrance with his pencil and knit his brows. Jack, with a sigh, took up the magazine.

A long silence followed, broken only by the hurried rustling of sheets of copy and an occasional exasperated start from the editor. The sun was already beginning to slant a dusty beam across his desk; Jack's whistling had long since ceased. Presently, with an exclamation of relief, the editor laid aside the last proof-sheet and looked up.

Jack Hamlin had closed the magazine, but with one hand thrown over the back of the sofa he was still holding it, his slim forefinger between its leaves to keep the place, and his

handsome profile and dark lashes lifted towards the window. The editor, smiling at this unwonted abstraction, said quietly—"Well, what do you think of them?"

Jack rose, laid the magazine down, settled his white waistcoat with both hands, and lounged towards his friend with audacious but slightly veiled and shining eyes. "They sort of sing themselves to you," he said quietly, leaning beside the editor's desk and looking down upon him. After a pause he said, "Then you don't know what she's like?"

"That's what Mr. Bowers asked me," remarked the editor.

"D——n Bowers!"

"I suppose you also wish me to write and ask for permission to give you her address?" said the editor, with great gravity.

"No," said Jack coolly. "I propose to give it to *you* within a week, and you will pay me with a breakfast. I should like to have it said that I was once a paid contributor to literature. If I don't give it to you, I'll stand you a dinner, that's all."

"Done!" said the editor. "And you know nothing of her now?"

"No," said Jack promptly. "Nor you?"

"No more than I have told you."

"That'll do. So long!" And Jack, carefully adjusting his glossy hat over his curls at an ominously wicked angle, sauntered lightly from the room. The editor, glancing after his handsome figure and hearing him take up his pretermitted whistle as he passed out, began to think that the contingent dinner was by no means an inevitable prospect.

Howbeit, he plunged once more into his monotonous duties. But the freshness of the day seemed to have departed with Jack, and the later interruptions of foreman and publisher were of a more practical character. It was not until the post arrived that the superscription on one of

the letters caught his eye and revived his former interest. It was the same hand as that of his unknown contributor's manuscript—ill-formed and boyish. He opened the envelope. It contained another poem with the same signature, but also a note—much longer than the brief lines that accompanied the first contribution—was scrawled upon a separate piece of paper. This the editor opened first, and read the following, with an amazement that for the moment dominated all other sense:—

“MR. EDITOR,—I see you have got my poetry in. But I don't see the spondulix that oughter follow. Perhaps you don't know where to send it. Then I'll tell you. Send the money to Lock Box 47, Green Springs P. O., per Wells Fargo's Express, and I'll get it there, on account of my parents not knowing. We're very high-toned, and they would think it's low making poetry for papers. Send amount usually paid for poetry in your papers. Or maybe you think I make poetry for nothing? That's where you slip up!—
Yours truly, WHITE VIOLET.”

“P.S.—If you don't pay for poetry, send this back. It's as good as what you did put in, and is just as hard to make. You hear me? that's me—all the time.

“WHITE VIOLET.”

The editor turned quickly to the new contribution for some corroboration of what he felt must be an extraordinary blunder. But no! The few lines that he hurriedly read breathed the same atmosphere of intellectual repose, gentleness, and imagination as the first contribution. And yet they were in the same handwriting as the singular missive, and both were identical with the previous manuscript.

Had he been the victim of a hoax, and were the verses not original? No; they were distinctly original, local in colour, and even local in the use of certain old English

words that were common in the South-west. He had before noticed the apparent incongruity of the handwriting and the text, and it was possible that for the purposes of disguise the poet might have employed an amanuensis. But how could he reconcile the incongruity of the mercenary and slangy purport of the missive itself with the mental habit of its author? Was it possible that these inconsistent qualities existed in the one individual? He smiled grimly as he thought of his visitor Bowers and his friend Jack. He was startled as he remembered the purely imaginative picture he had himself given to the seriously interested Bowers of the possible incongruous personality of the poetess.

Was he quite fair in keeping this from Jack? Was it really honourable, in view of their wager? It is to be feared that a very human enjoyment of Jack's possible discomfiture, quite as much as any chivalrous friendship, impelled the editor to ring eventually for the office-boy.

"See if Mr. Hamlin is in his rooms."

The editor then sat down and wrote rapidly as follows:—

"DEAR MADAM,—You are as right as you are generous in supposing that only ignorance of your address prevented the manager from previously remitting the honorarium for your beautiful verses. He now begs to send it to you in the manner you have indicated. As the verses have attracted deserved attention, I have been applied to for your address. Should you care to submit it to me to be used at my discretion, I shall feel honoured by your confidence. But this is a matter left entirely to your own kindness and better judgment. Meantime, I take pleasure in accepting 'White Violet's' present contribution, and remain, dear madam, your obedient servant,

THE EDITOR."

The boy returned as he was folding the letter. Mr. Hamlin was not only *not* in his rooms, but, according to

his negro servant Pete, had left town an hour ago for a few days in the country.

"Did he say where?" asked the editor quickly.

"No, sir; he didn't know."

"Very well. Take this to the manager." He addressed the letter, and, scrawling a few hieroglyphics on a memorandum-tag, tore it off, and handed it with the letter to the boy.

An hour later he stood in the manager's office. "The next number is pretty well made up," he said carelessly, "and I think of taking a day or two off."

"Certainly," said the manager. "It will do you good. Where do you think you'll go?"

"I haven't quite made up my mind."

CHAPTER II.

"HULLO!" said Jack Hamlin.

He had halted his mare at the edge of an abrupt chasm. It did not appear to be fifty feet across, yet its depth must have been nearly two hundred to where the hidden mountain stream, of which it was the banks, alternately slipped, tumbled, and fell with murmuring and monotonous regularity. One or two pine-trees growing on the opposite edge, loosened at the roots, had tilted their straight shafts like spears over the abyss, and the top of one, resting on the upper branches of a sycamore a few yards from him, served as an aerial bridge for the passage of a boy of fourteen, to whom Mr. Hamlin's challenge was addressed.

The boy stopped midway in his perilous transit, and, looking down upon the horseman, responded coolly, "Hullo, yourself!"

"Is that the only way across this infernal hole, or the one you prefer for exercise?" continued Hamlin gravely.

The boy sat down on a bough, allowing his bare feet to dangle over the dizzy depths, and critically examined his questioner. Jack had on this occasion modified his usual correct conventional attire by a tasteful combination of a vaquero's costume, and, in loose white bullion-fringed trousers, red sash, jacket, and sombrero, looked infinitely more dashing and picturesque than his original. Nevertheless the boy did not reply. Mr. Hamlin's pride in his usual ascendancy over women, children, horses, and all unreasoning animals was deeply nettled. He smiled, however, and said quietly—

“Come here, George Washington. I want to talk to you.”

Without rejecting this august yet impossible title, the boy presently lifted his feet and carelessly resumed his passage across the chasm until, reaching the sycamore, he began to let himself down squirrel-wise, leap by leap, with an occasional trapeze swinging from bough to bough, dropping at last easily to the ground. Here he appeared to be rather good-looking, albeit the sun and air had worked a miracle of brown tan and freckles on his exposed surfaces, until the mottling of his oval cheeks looked like a polished bird's egg. Indeed, it struck Mr. Hamlin that he was as intensely a part of that sylvan seclusion as the hidden brook that murmured, the brown velvet shadows that lay like trappings on the white flanks of his horse, the quivering heat, and the stinging spice of bay. Mr. Hamlin had vague ideas of dryads and fauns, but at that moment would have bet something on the chances of their survival.

“I did not hear what you said just now, general,” he remarked, with great elegance of manner, “but I know from your reputation that it could not be a lie. I therefore gather that there *is* another way across.”

The boy smiled ; rather his very short upper lip apparently vanished completely over his white teeth, and his very black

eyes—which showed a great deal of the white around them—danced in their orbits.

“But *you* couldn’t find it,” he said slyly.

“No more could you find the half-dollar I dropped just now, unless I helped you.”

Mr. Hamlin, by way of illustration, leaned deeply over his left stirrup and pointed to the ground. At the same moment a bright half-dollar absolutely appeared to glitter in the herbage at the point of his finger. It was a trick that had always brought great pleasure and profit to his young friends and some loss and discomfiture of wager to his older ones.

The boy picked up the coin. “There’s a dip and a level crossing about a mile over yer,”—he pointed—“but it’s through the woods, and they’re that high with thick bresh.”

“With what?”

“Bresh,” repeated the boy; “*that*,”—pointing to a few fronds of bracken growing in the shadow of the sycamore.

“Oh! underbrush?”

“Yes; I said ‘bresh,’” returned the boy doggedly. “*You* might get through, ef you war spry, but not your hoss. Where do you want to go, anyway?”

“Do you know, George,” said Mr. Hamlin, lazily throwing his right leg over the horn of his saddle for greater ease and deliberation in replying, “it’s very odd, but that’s just what *I’d* like to know. Now, what would *you*, in your broad statesmanlike views of things generally, advise?”

Quite convinced of the stranger’s mental unsoundness, the boy glanced again at his half-dollar, as if to make sure of *its* integrity, pocketed it doubtfully, and turned away.

“Where are you going?” said Hamlin, resuming his seat with the agility of a circus-rider, and spurring forward.

“To Green Springs—where I live—two miles over the ridge on the far slope,” indicating the direction.

"Ah!" said Jack, with thoughtful gravity. "Well, kindly give my love to your sister, will you?"

"George Washington didn't have no sister," said the boy cunningly.

"Can I have been mistaken?" said Hamlin, lifting his hand to his forehead with grieved accents. "Then it seems *you* have. Kindly give her my love."

"Which one?" asked the boy, with a swift glance of mischief. "I've got four."

"The one that's like you," returned Hamlin, with prompt exactitude. "Now, where's the 'bresh' you spoke of?"

"Keep along the edge until you come to the log-slide. Foller that, and it'll lead you into the woods. But ye won't go far, I tell ye. When you have to turn back, instead o' comin' back here, you kin take the trail that goes round the woods, and that'll bring ye out into the stage road ag'in near the post-office at the Green Springs crossin' and the new hotel. That'll be whar ye'll turn up, I reckon," he added reflectively. "Fellers that come yer gunnin' and fishin' gin'rally do," he concluded, with a half-inquisitive air.

"Ah?" said Mr. Hamlin, quietly shedding the inquiry. "Green Springs Hotel is where the stage stops, eh?"

"Yes, and at the post-office," said the boy. "She'll be along here soon," he added.

"If you mean the Santa Cruz stage," said Hamlin, "she's here already. I passed her on the ridge, half an hour ago."

The boy gave a sudden start, and a quick uneasy expression passed over his face. "Go 'long with ye!" he said, with a forced smile; "it ain't her time yet."

"But I *saw* her," repeated Hamlin, much amused. "Are you expecting company? Hullo! Where are you off to? Come back."

But his companion had already vanished in the thicket with the undeliberate and impulsive act of an animal. There

was a momentary rustle in the alders fifty feet away, and then all was silent. The hidden brook took up its monotonous murmur, the tapping of a distant woodpecker became suddenly audible, and Mr. Hamlin was again alone.

"Wonder whether he's got parents in the stage, and has been playing truant here," he mused lazily. "Looked as if he'd been up to some devilment—or more like as if he was primed for it. If he'd been a little older I'd have bet he was in league with some road-agents to watch the coach. Just my luck to have him light out as I was beginning to get some talk out of him." He paused, looked at his watch, and straightened himself in his stirrups. "Four o'clock. I reckon I might as well try the woods and what that imp calls the 'bresh;' I may strike a shanty or a native by the way."

With this determination, Mr. Hamlin urged his horse along the faint trail by the brink of the watercourse which the boy had just indicated. He had no definite end in view beyond the one that had brought him the day before to that locality—his quest of the unknown poetess. His clue would have seemed to ordinary humanity the faintest. He had merely noted the provincial name of a certain plant mentioned in the poem, and learned that its habitat was limited to the southern local range; while its peculiar nomenclature was clearly of French Creole or Gulf State origin. This gave him a large though sparsely populated area for locality, while it suggested a settlement of Louisianians or Mississippians near the summit, of whom, through their native gambling proclivities, he was professionally cognisant. But he mainly trusted Fortune. Secure in his faith in the feminine character of that goddess, he relied a great deal on her well-known weakness for scamps of his quality.

It was not long before he came to the "slide"—a lightly-cut or shallow ditch. It descended slightly in a course that was far from straight, at times diverging to avoid the obstacles

of trees or boulders, at times shaving them so closely as to leave smooth abrasions along their sides made by the grinding passage of long logs down the incline. The track itself was slippery from this, and preoccupied all Hamlin's skill as a horseman, even to the point of stopping his usual careless whistle. At the end of half an hour the track became level again, and he was confronted with a singular phenomenon.

He had entered the wood, and the trail seemed to cleave through a far-stretching, motionless sea of ferns that flowed on either side to the height of his horse's flanks. The straight shafts of the trees rose like columns from their hidden bases and were lost again in a roof of impenetrable leafage, leaving a clear space of fifty feet between, through which the surrounding horizon of sky was perfectly visible. All the light that entered this vast sylvan hall came from the sides; nothing permeated from above; nothing radiated from below; the height of the crest on which the wood was placed gave it this lateral illumination, but gave it also the profound isolation of some temple raised by long-forgotten hands. In spite of the height of these clear shafts, they seemed dwarfed by the expanse of the wood, and in the farthest perspective the base of ferns and the capital of foliage appeared almost to meet. As the boy had warned him, the slide had turned aside, skirting the wood to follow the incline, and presently the little trail he now followed vanished utterly, leaving him and his horse adrift breast-high in this green and yellow sea of fronds. But Mr. Hamlin, imperious of obstacles, and touched by some curiosity, continued to advance lazily, taking the bearings of a large red-wood in the centre of the grove for his objective point. The elastic mass gave way before him, brushing his knees or combing his horse's flanks with widespread elfin fingers, and closing up behind him as he passed, as if to obliterate any track by which he might return. Yet his usual luck did not desert him here. Being

on horseback, he found that he could detect what had been invisible to the boy and probably to all pedestrians—namely, that the growth was not equally dense, that there were certain thinner and more open spaces that he could take advantage of by more circuitous progression, always, however, keeping the bearings of the central tree. This he at last reached, and halted his panting horse. Here a new idea which had been haunting him since he entered the wood took fuller possession of him. He had seen or known all this before ! There was a strange familiarity either in these objects or in the impression or spell they left upon him. He remembered the verses ! Yes, this was the “underbrush” which the poetess had described : the gloom above and below, the light that seemed blown through it like the wind, the suggestion of hidden life beneath this tangled luxuriance, which she alone had penetrated—all this was here. But, more than that, here was the atmosphere that she had breathed into the plaintive melody of her verse. It did not necessarily follow that Mr. Hamlin’s translation of her sentiment was the correct one, or that the ideas her verses had provoked in his mind were at all what had been hers : in his easy susceptibility he was simply thrown into a corresponding mood of emotion, and relieved himself with song. One of the verses he had already associated in his mind with the rhythm of an old plantation melody, and it struck his fancy to take advantage of the solitude to try its effect. Humming to himself, at first softly, he at last grew bolder, and let his voice drift away through the stark pillars of the sylvan colonnade till it seemed to suffuse and fill it with no more effort than the light which strayed in on either side. Sitting thus, his hat thrown a little back from his clustering curls, the white neck and shoulders of his horse uplifting him above the crested mass of fern, his red sash the one fleck of colour in their olive depths, I am afraid he looked much more like

the real minstrel of the grove than the unknown poetess who transfigured it. But this, as has been already indicated, was Jack Hamlin's peculiar gift. Even as he had previously outshone the vaquero in his borrowed dress, he now silenced and supplanted a few fluttering blue-jays—rightful tenants of the wood—with a more graceful and airy presence and a far sweeter voice.

The open horizon towards the west had taken a warmer colour from the already slanting sun when Mr. Hamlin, having rested his horse, turned to that direction. He had noticed that the wood was thinner there, and, pushing forward, he was presently rewarded by the sound of far-off wheels, and knew he must be near the highroad that the boy had spoken of. Having given up his previous intention of crossing the stream, there seemed nothing better for him to do than to follow the truant's advice and take the road back to Green Springs. Yet he was loath to leave the wood, halting on its verge, and turning to look back into its charmed recesses. Once or twice—perhaps because he recalled the words of the poem—that yellowish sea of ferns had seemed instinct with hidden life, and he had even fancied, here and there, a swaying of its plumed crests. Howbeit, he still lingered long enough for the open sunlight into which he had obtruded to point out the bravery of his handsome figure. Then he wheeled his horse, the light glanced from polished double bit and bridle-frifferies, caught his red sash and bullion buttons, struck a parting flash from his silver spurs, and he was gone!

For a moment the light streamed unbrokenly through the wood. And then it could be seen that the yellow mass of undergrowth *had* moved with the passage of another figure than his own. For ever since he had entered the shade a woman, shawled in a vague shapeless fashion, had watched him wonderingly, eagerly, excitedly, gliding from

tree to tree as he advanced, or else dropping breathlessly below the fronds of fern, whence she gazed at him as between parted fingers. When he wheeled she had run openly to the west, albeit with hidden face and still clinging shawl, and taken a last look at his retreating figure. And then, with a faint but lingering sigh, she drew back into the shadow of the wood again and vanished also.

CHAPTER III.

AT the end of twenty minutes Mr. Hamlin reined in his mare. He had just observed in the distant shadows of a by-lane that intersected his road the vanishing flutter of two light print dresses. Without a moment's hesitation he lightly swerved out of the highroad and followed the retreating figures.

As he neared them, they seemed to be two slim young girls, evidently so preoccupied with the rustic amusement of edging each other off the grassy border into the dust of the track that they did not perceive his approach. Little shrieks, slight scufflings, and interjections of "Cynthy! you limb!" "Quit that, Eunice, now!" and "I just call that real mean!" apparently drowned the sound of his canter in the soft dust. Checking his speed to a gentle trot, and pressing his horse close beside the opposite fence, he passed them with gravely-uplifted hat and a serious preoccupied air. But in that single, seemingly conventional glance Mr. Hamlin had seen that they were both pretty, and that one had the short upper lip of his errant little guide. A hundred yards farther on he halted, as if irresolutely, gazed doubtfully ahead of him, and then turned back. An expression of innocent—almost childlike—concern was clouding the rascal's face. It was well, as the two girls had drawn closely together,

having been apparently surprised in the midst of a glowing eulogium of this glorious passing vision by its sudden return. At his nearer approach the one with the short upper lip hid that piquant feature and the rest of her rosy face behind the other's shoulder, which was suddenly and significantly opposed to the advance of this handsome intruder with a certain dignity, half-real, half-affected, but wholly charming. The protectress appeared—possibly from her defensive attitude—the superior of her companion.

Audacious as Jack was to his own sex, he had early learned that such rare but discomposing graces as he possessed required a certain apologetic attitude when presented to women, and that it was only a plain man who could be always complacently self-confident in their presence. There was, consequently, a hesitating lowering of this hypocrite's brown eyelashes as he said, in almost pained accents—

"Excuse me, but I fear I've taken the wrong road. I'm going to Green Springs."

"I reckon you've taken the wrong road, wherever you're going," returned the young lady, having apparently made up her mind to resent each of Jack's perfections as a separate impertinence: "this is a *private* road." She drew herself fairly up here, although gurgled at in the ear and pinched in the arm by her companion.

"I beg your pardon," said Jack meekly. "I see I'm trespassing on your grounds. I'm very sorry. Thank you for telling me. I should have gone on a mile or two farther, I suppose, until I came to your house," he added innocently.

"A mile or two! You'd have run chock ag'in' our gate in another minit," said the short-lipped one eagerly. But a sharp nudge from her companion sent her back again into cover, where she waited expectantly for another crushing retort from her protector.

But, alas! it did not come. One cannot be always witty,

and Jack looked distressed. Nevertheless, he took advantage of the pause.

"It was so stupid in me, as I think your brother"—looking at Short-lip—"very carefully told me the road."

The two girls darted quick glances at each other. "Oh, Bawb!" said the first speaker, in wearied accents—"that limb! He don't keer."

"But he *did* care," said Hamlin quietly, "and gave me a good deal of information. Thanks to him, I was able to see that ferny wood that's so famous—about two miles up the road. You know—the one that there's a poem written about!"

The shot told! Short-lip burst into a display of dazzling little teeth, and caught the other girl convulsively by the shoulders. The superior girl bent her pretty brows, and said, "Eunice, what's gone of ye? Quit that!" but, as Hamlin thought, paled slightly.

"Of course," said Hamlin quickly, "you know—the poem everybody's talking about. Dear me! let me see! how does it go?" The rascal knit his brows, said, "Ah, yes," and then murmured the verse he had lately sung quite as musically.

Short-lip was shamelessly exalted and excited. Really she could scarcely believe it! She already heard herself relating the whole occurrence. Here was the most beautiful young man she had ever seen—an entire stranger—talking to them in the most beautiful and natural way, right in the lane, and reciting poetry to her sister! It was like a novel—only more so. She thought that Cynthia, on the other hand, looked distressed, and—she must say it—"silly."

All of which Jack noted, and was wise. He had got all he wanted—at present. He gathered up his reins.

"Thank you so much, and your brother too, Miss Cynthia," he said, without looking up. Then adding, with

a parting glance and smile, "But don't tell Bob how stupid I was," he swiftly departed.

In half an hour he was at the Green Springs Hotel. As he rode into the stable-yard he noticed that the coach had only just arrived, having been detained by a land-slip on the Summit road. With the recollection of Bob fresh in his mind, he glanced at the loungers at the stage office. The boy was not there, but a moment later Jack detected him among the waiting crowd at the post-office opposite. With a view of following up his inquiries, he crossed the road as the boy entered the vestibule of the post-office. He arrived in time to see him unlock one of a row of numbered letter-boxes rented by subscribers, which occupied a partition by the window, and take out a small package and a letter. But in that brief glance Mr. Hamlin detected the printed address of the *Excelsior Magazine* on the wrapper. It was enough. Luck was certainly with him.

He had time to get rid of the wicked sparkle that had lit his dark eyes, and to lounge carelessly towards the boy as the latter broke open the package and then hurriedly concealed it in his jacket pocket and started for the door. Mr. Hamlin quickly followed him unperceived, and, as he stepped into the street, gently tapped him on the shoulder. The boy turned and faced him quickly. But Mr. Hamlin's eyes showed nothing but lazy good-humour.

"Hullo, Bob. Where are you going?"

The boy again looked up suspiciously at this revelation of his name.

"Home," he said briefly.

"Oh, over yonder," said Hamlin calmly. "I don't mind walking with you as far as the lane."

He saw the boy's eyes glance furtively towards an alley that ran beside the blacksmith's shop a few rods ahead, and was convinced that he intended to evade him there.

Slipping his arm carelessly in the youth's, he concluded to open fire at once.

"Bob," he said, with irresistible gravity, "I did not know when I met you this morning that I had the honour of addressing a poet—none other than the famous author of 'Underbrush.'"

The boy started back and endeavoured to withdraw his arm, but Mr. Hamlin tightened his hold, without, however, changing his careless expression.

"You see," he continued, "the editor is a friend of mine, and, being afraid this package might not get into the right hands—as you didn't give your name—he deputed me to come here and see that it was all square. As you're rather young, for all you're so gifted, I reckon I'd better go home with you and take a receipt from your parents. That's about square, I think?"

The consternation of the boy was so evident and so far beyond Mr. Hamlin's expectation that he instantly halted him, gazed into his shifting eyes, and gave a long whistle.

"Who said it was for *me*? Wot you talkin' about? Lemme go!" gasped the boy, with the short intermittent breath of mingled fear and passion.

"Bob," said Mr. Hamlin, in a singularly colourless voice which was very rare with him, and an expression quite unlike his own, "what is your little game?"

The boy looked down in dogged silence.

"Out with it! Who are you playing this on?"

"It's all among my own folks; it's nothin' to *you*," said the boy, suddenly beginning to struggle violently, as if inspired by this extenuating fact.

"Among your own folks, eh? 'White Violet' and the rest, eh? But *she's* not in it?"

No reply.

"Hand me over that package. I'll give it back to you again."

The boy handed it to Mr. Hamlin. He read the letter, and found the enclosure contained a twenty-dollar gold piece. A half-supercilious smile passed over his face at this revelation of the inadequate emoluments of literature and the trifling inducements to crime. Indeed, I fear the affair began to take a less serious moral complexion in his eyes.

"Then 'White Violet'—your sister Cynthia, you know," continued Mr. Hamlin in easy parenthesis—"wrote for this?" holding the coin contemplatively in his fingers, "and you calculated to nab it yourself?"

The quick searching glance with which Bob received the name of his sister Mr. Hamlin attributed only to his natural surprise that this stranger should be on such familiar terms with her; but the boy responded immediately and bluntly—

"No! *She* didn't write for it. *She* didn't want nobody to know who she was. Nobody wrote for it but me. Nobody *knew folks was paid for po'try but me*. I found it out from a feller. I wrote for it. *I* wasn't goin' to let that skunk of an editor have it himself."

"And you thought *you* would take it," said Hamlin, his voice resuming its old tone. "Well, George—I mean Bob, your conduct was praiseworthy, although your intentions were bad. Still, twenty dollars is rather too much for your trouble. Suppose we say five and call it square?" He handed the astonished boy five dollars. "Now, George Washington," he continued, taking four other twenty-dollar pieces from his pocket and adding them to the enclosure, which he carefully refolded, "I'm going to give you another chance to live up to your reputation. You'll take that package and hand it to 'White Violet' and say you found it, just as it is, in the lock-box. I'll keep the letter, for it

would knock you endways if it was seen, and I'll make it all right with the editor. But, as I've got to tell him that I've seen 'White Violet' myself and know she's got it, I expect *you* to manage in some way to have me see her. I'll manage the rest of it; and I won't blow on you, either. You'll come back to the hotel and tell me what you've done. And now, George," concluded Mr. Hamlin, succeeding at last in fixing the boy's evasive eye with a peculiar look, "it may be just as well for you to understand that I know every nook and corner of this place, that I've already been through that underbrush you spoke of once this morning, and that I've got a mare that can go wherever *you* can, and a d——d sight quicker!"

"I'll give the package to 'White Violet,'" said the boy doggedly.

"And you'll come back to the hotel?"

The boy hesitated, and then said, "I'll come back."

"All right, then. *Adios*, general."

Bob disappeared around the corner of a cross-road at a rapid trot, and Mr. Hamlin turned into the hotel.

"Smart little chap that!" he said to the barkeeper.

"You bet!" returned the man, who, having recognised Mr. Hamlin, was delighted at the prospect of conversing with a gentleman of such decided dangerous reputation. "But he's been allowed to run a little wild since old man Delatour died, and the widder's got enough to do, I reckon, lookin' arter her four gals and takin' keer of old Delatour's ranch over yonder. I guess it's pretty hard sleddin' for her sometimes to get clo'es and grub for the famerly, without follerin' Bob around."

"Sharp girls, too, I reckon; one of them writes things for the magazines, doesn't she?—Cynthia, eh?" said Mr. Hamlin carelessly.

Evidently this fact was not a notorious one to the bar-

keeper. He, however, said, "Dunno ; mabbee ; her father was eddicated, and the widder Delatour too, though she's sorter queer, I've heard tell. Lord ! Mr. Hamlin, *you* oughter remember old man Delatour ! From Opelousas, Louisiany, you know ! High old sport—French style, frilled bosom—open-handed, and us'ter buck ag'in' faro awful ! Why, he dropped a heap o' money to *you* over in San José two years ago at poker ! You must remember him !"

The slightest possible flush passed over Mr. Hamlin's brow under the shadow of his hat, but did not get lower than his eyes. He suddenly *had* recalled the spendthrift Delatour perfectly, and as quickly regretted now that he had not doubled the honorarium he had just sent to his portionless daughter. But he only said coolly, "No," and then, raising his pale face and audacious eyes, continued in his laziest and most insulting manner, "No ; the fact is, my mind is just now preoccupied in wondering if the gas is leaking anywhere, and if anything is ever served over this bar except elegant conversation. When the gentleman who mixes drinks comes back, perhaps you'll be good enough to tell him to send a whisky sour to Mr. Jack Hamlin in the parlour. Meantime, you can turn off your soda-fountain ; I don't want any fizz in mine."

Having thus quite recovered himself, Mr. Hamlin lounged gracefully across the hall into the parlour. As he did so, a darkish young man, with a slim boyish figure, a thin face, and a discontented expression, rose from an armchair, held out his hand, and, with a saturnine smile, said—

"Jack !"

"Fred !"

The two men remained gazing at each other with a half-amused, half-guarded expression. Mr. Hamlin was first to begin. "I didn't think *you'd* be such a fool as to try on this kind of thing, Fred," he said half seriously.

"Yes, but it was to keep you from being a much bigger one that I hunted you up," said the editor mischievously. "Read that. I got it an hour after you left." And he placed a little triumphantly in Jack's hand the letter he had received from "White Violet."

Mr. Hamlin read it with an unmoved face, and then laid his two hands on the editor's shoulders. "Yes, my young friend, and you sat down and wrote her a pretty letter and sent her twenty dollars—which, permit me to say, was d——d poor pay! But that isn't your fault, I reckon; it's the meanness of your proprietors."

"But it isn't the question, either, just now, Jack, however you have been able to answer it. Do you mean to say seriously that you want to know anything more of a woman who could write such a letter?"

"I don't know," said Jack cheerfully. "She might be a devilish sight funnier than if she hadn't written it—which is the fact."

"You mean to say *she* didn't write it?"

"Yes."

"Who did, then?"

"Her brother Bob."

After a moment's scrutiny of his friend's bewildered face, Mr. Hamlin briefly related his adventures, from the moment of his meeting Bob at the mountain stream to the barkeeper's gossiping comment and sequel. "Therefore," he concluded, "the author of 'Underbrush' is Miss Cynthia Delatour, one of four daughters of a widow who lives two miles from here at the crossing. I shall see her this evening and make sure; but to-morrow morning you will pay me the breakfast you owe me. She's good-looking, but I can't say I fancy the poetic style; it's a little too high-toned for me. However, I love my love with a C, because she is your Contributor; I hate her with a C, because of her Connections; I met

her by Chance, and treated her with Civility ; her name is Cynthia, and she lives on a Cross-road."

"But you surely don't expect you will ever see Bob again?" said the editor impatiently. "You have trusted him with enough to start him for the Sandwich Islands—to say nothing of the ruinous precedent you have established in his mind of the value of poetry. I am surprised that a man of your knowledge of the world would have faith in that imp the second time."

"My knowledge of the world," returned Mr. Hamlin sententiously, "tells me that's the only way you can trust anybody. *Once* doesn't make a habit, nor show a character. I could see by his bungling that he had never tried this on before. Just now the temptation to wipe out his punishment by doing the square thing, and coming back a sort of hero, is stronger than any other. 'Tisn't everybody that gets that chance," he added, with an odd laugh.

Nevertheless, three hours passed without bringing Bob. The two men had gone to the billiard-room, when a waiter brought a note which he handed to Mr. Hamlin with some apologetic hesitation. It bore no superscription, but had been brought by a boy who described Mr. Hamlin perfectly, and requested that the note should be handed to him with the remark that "Bob had come back."

"And is he there now?" asked Mr. Hamlin, holding the letter unopened in his hand.

"No, sir ; he run right off."

The editor laughed, but Mr. Hamlin, having perused the note, put away his cue. "Come into my room," he said.

The editor followed, and Mr. Hamlin laid the note before him on the table. "Bob's all right," he said, "for I'll bet a thousand dollars that note is genuine."

It was delicately written, in a cultivated feminine hand,

utterly unlike the scrawl that had first excited the editor's curiosity, and ran as follows:—

“He who brought me the bounty of your friend—for I cannot call a recompense so far above my deserts by any other name—gives me also to understand that you wished for an interview. I cannot believe that this is mere idle curiosity, or that you have any motive that is not kindly and honourable, but I feel that I must beg and pray you not to seek to remove the veil behind which I have chosen to hide myself and my poor efforts from identification. *I think* I know you—I *know* I know myself—well enough to believe it would give neither of us any happiness. You will say to your generous friend that he has already given the Unknown more comfort and hope than could come from any personal compliment or publicity, and you will yourself believe that you have all unconsciously brightened a sad woman's fancy with a Dream and a Vision that before to-day had been unknown to

WHITE VIOLET.”

“Have you read it?” asked Mr. Hamlin.

“Yes.”

“Then you don't want to see it any more, or even remember you ever saw it,” said Mr. Hamlin, carefully tearing the note into small pieces and letting them drift from the windows like blown blossoms.

“But I say, Jack! look here; I don't understand! You say you have already seen this woman, and yet——”

“*I haven't* seen her,” said Jack composedly, turning from the window.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that you and I, Fred, are going to drop this fooling right here and leave this place for Frisco by first stage to-morrow, and—that I owe you that dinner.”

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the stage for San Francisco rolled away the next morning with Mr. Hamlin and the editor, the latter might have recognised in the occupant of a dust-covered buggy that was coming leisurely towards them the tall figure, long beard, and straight duster of his late visitor, Mr. James Bowers. For Mr. Bowers was on the same quest that the others had just abandoned; like Mr. Hamlin, he had been left to his own resources, but Mr. Bowers's resources were a lifelong experience and technical skill; he too had noted the topographical indications of the poem, and his knowledge of the sylva of Upper California pointed as unerringly as Mr. Hamlin's luck to the cryptogamous haunts of the Summit. Such abnormal growths were indicative of certain localities only, but, as they were not remunerative from a pecuniary point of view, were to be avoided by the sagacious woodman. It was clear, therefore, that Mr. Bowers's visit to Green Springs was not professional, and that he did not even figuratively accept the omen.

He baited and rested his horse at the hotel, where his bucolic exterior, however, did not elicit that attention which had been accorded to Mr. Hamlin's charming insolence or the editor's cultivated manner. But he glanced over a township map on the walls of the reading-room, and took note of the names of the owners of different lots, farms, and ranches, passing that of Delatour with the others. Then he drove leisurely in the direction of the woods, and, reaching them, tied his horse to a young sapling in the shade, and entered their domain with a shambling but familiar woodman's step.

It is not the purpose of this brief chronicle to follow Mr. Bowers in his professional diagnosis of the locality. He

recognised Nature in one of her moods of wasteful extravagance—a waste that his experienced eye could tell was also sapping the vitality of those outwardly robust shafts that rose around him. He knew, without testing them, that half of these fair-seeming columns were hollow and rotten at the core; he could detect the chill odour of decay through the hot balsamic spices stirred by the wind that streamed through their long aisles—like incense mingling with the exhalations of a crypt. He stopped now and then to part the heavy fronds down to their roots in the dank moss, seeing again, as he had told the editor, the weird *second* twilight through their miniature stems, and the microcosm of life that filled it. But, even while paying this tribute to the accuracy of the unknown poetess, he was, like his predecessor, haunted more strongly by the atmosphere and melody of her verse. Its spell was upon him too. Unlike Mr. Hamlin, he did not sing. He only halted once or twice, silently combing his straight narrow beard with his three fingers, until the action seemed to draw down the lines of his face into limitless dejection, and an inscrutable melancholy filled his small grey eyes. The few birds who had hailed Mr. Hamlin as their successful rival fled away before the grotesque and angular half-length of Mr. Bowers, as if the wind had blown in a scarecrow from the distant farms.

Suddenly he observed the figure of a woman, with her back towards him, leaning motionless against a tree and apparently gazing intently in the direction of Green Springs. He had approached so near to her that it was singular she had not heard him. Mr. Bowers was a bashful man in the presence of the other sex. He felt exceedingly embarrassed; if he could have gone away without attracting her attention he would have done so. Neither could he remain silent, a tacit spy of her meditation. He had recourse to a polite but singularly artificial cough.

To his surprise, she gave a faint cry, turned quickly towards him, and then shrank back and lapsed quite helpless against the tree. Her evident distress overcame his bashfulness. He ran towards her.

"I'm sorry I frightened ye, ma'am, but I was afraid I might skeer ye more if I lay low and said nothin'."

Even then, if she had been some fair young country girl, he would have relapsed after this speech into his former bashfulness. But the face and figure she turned towards him were neither young nor fair: a woman past forty, with grey threads and splashes in her brushed-back hair, which was turned over her ears in two curls like frayed strands of rope. Her forehead was rather high than broad, her nose large but well-shaped, and her eyes full, but so singularly light in colour as to seem almost sightless. The short upper lip of her large mouth displayed her teeth in an habitual smile, which was in turn so flatly contradicted by every other line of her careworn face that it seemed gratuitously artificial. Her figure was hidden by a shapeless garment that partook equally of the shawl, cloak, and wrapper.

"I am very foolish," she began, in a voice and accent that at once asserted a cultivated woman, "but I so seldom meet anybody here that a voice quite startled me. That, and the heat," she went on, wiping her face, into which the colour was returning violently—"for I seldom go out as early as this—I suppose affected me."

Mr. Bowers had that innate Far-Western reverence for womanhood which I fancy challenges the most polished politeness. He remained patient, undemonstrative, self-effacing, and respectful before her, his angular arm slightly but not obtrusively advanced, the offer of protection being in the act rather than in any spoken word, and requiring no response.

"Like as not, ma'am," he said cheerfully, looking every-

where but in her burning face. "The sun *is* pow'ful hot at this time o' day ; I felt it myself comin' yer, and, though the damp of this timber kinder sets it back, it's likely to come out ag'in. Ye can't check it no more than the sap in that choked limb thar"—he pointed ostentatiously where a fallen pine had been caught in the bent and twisted arm of another, but which still put out a few green tassels beyond the point of impact. "Do you live far from here, ma'am?" he added.

"Only as far as the first turning below the hill."

"I've got my buggy here, and I'm goin' that way, and I can jist set ye down thar cool and comfortable. Ef," he continued, in the same assuring tone, without waiting for a reply, "ye'll jist take a good grip of my arm thar," curving his wrist and hand behind him like a shepherd's crook, "I'll go first, and break away the brush for ye."

She obeyed mechanically, and they fared on through the thick ferns in this fashion for some moments, he looking ahead, occasionally dropping a word of caution or encouragement, but never glancing at her face. When they reached the buggy he lifted her into it carefully, and perpendicularly—it struck her afterwards, very much as if she had been a transplanted sapling with bared and sensitive roots—and then gravely took his place beside her.

"Bein' in the timber trade myself, ma'am," he said, gathering up the reins, "I chanced to sight these woods, and took a look around. My name is Bowers, of Mendocino ; I reckon there ain't much that grows in the way o' stannin' timber on the Pacific Slope that I don't know and can't locate, though I *do* say it. I've got ez big a mill, and ez big a run in my district, as there is anywhere. Ef you're ever up my way, you ask for Bowers—Jim Bowers—and that's *me*."

There is probably nothing more conducive to conversation

between strangers than a wholesome and early recognition of each other's foibles. Mr. Bowers, believing his chance acquaintance a superior woman, naïvely spoke of himself in a way that he hoped would reassure her that she was not compromising herself in accepting his civility, and so satisfy what must be her inevitable pride. On the other hand, the woman regained her self-possession by this exhibition of Mr. Bowers's vanity, and, revived by the refreshing breeze caused by the rapid motion of the buggy along the road, thanked him graciously.

"I suppose there are many strangers at the Green Springs Hotel," she said, after a pause.

"I didn't get to see 'em, as I only put up my hoss there," he replied. "But I know the stage took some away this mornin'; it seemed pretty well loaded up when I passed it."

The woman drew a deep sigh. The act struck Mr. Bowers as a possible return of her former nervous weakness. Her attention must at once be distracted at any cost—even conversation.

"Perhaps," he began, with sudden and appalling lightness, "I'm a-talkin' to Mrs. McFadden?"

"No," said the woman abstractedly.

"Then it must be Mrs. Delatour? There are only two township lots on that cross-road."

"My name *is* Delatour," she said somewhat wearily.

Mr. Bowers was conversationally stranded. He was not at all anxious to know her name, yet, knowing it now, it seemed to suggest that there was nothing more to say. He would, of course, have preferred to ask her if she had read the poetry about the underbrush, and if she knew the poetess, and what she thought of it; but the fact that she appeared to be an "edicated" woman made him sensitive of displaying technical ignorance in his manner of talking about it. She might ask him if it was "subjective" or

“objective”—two words he had heard used at the Debating Society at Mendocino on the question, “Is poetry morally beneficial?” For a few moments he was silent. But presently she took the initiative in conversation, at first slowly and abstractedly, and then, as if appreciating his sympathetic reticence, or mayhap finding some relief in monotonous expression, talked mechanically, deliberately, but unostentatiously about herself. So colourless was her intonation that at times it did not seem as if she was talking *to* him, but repeating some conversation she had held with another.

She had lived there ever since she had been in California. Her husband had bought the Spanish title to the property when they first married. The property at his death was found to be greatly involved; she had been obliged to part with much of it to support her children—four girls and a boy. She had been compelled to withdraw the girls from the convent at Santa Clara to help about the house; the boy was too young—she feared, too shiftless—to do anything. The farm did not pay; the land was poor; she knew nothing about farming; she had been brought up in New Orleans, where her father had been a judge, and she didn’t understand country life. Of course she had been married too young—as all girls were. Lately she had thought of selling off and moving to San Francisco, where she would open a boarding-house or a school for young ladies. He could advise her, perhaps, of some good opportunity. Her own girls were far enough advanced to assist her in teaching; one particularly, Cynthia, was quite clever, and spoke French and Spanish fluently.

As Mr. Bowers was familiar with many of these counts in the feminine American indictment of life generally, he was not perhaps greatly moved. But in the last sentence he thought he saw an opening to return to his main object, and looking up cautiously, said—

“And mebbe write po'try now and then?”

To his great discomfiture, the only effect of this suggestion was to check his companion's speech for some moments, and apparently throw her back into her former abstraction. Yet, after a long pause, as they were turning into the lane, she said, as if continuing the subject—

“I only hope that, whatever my daughters may do, they won't marry young.”

The yawning breaches in the Delatour gates and fences presently came in view. They were supposed to be reinforced by half-a-dozen dogs, who, however, did their duty with what would seem to be the prevailing inefficiency, retiring after a single perfunctory yelp to shameless stretching, scratching, and slumber. Their places were taken on the verandah by two negro servants, two girls respectively of eight and eleven, and a boy of fourteen, who remained silently staring. As Mr. Bowers had accepted the widow's polite invitation to enter, she was compelled, albeit in an equally dazed and helpless way, to issue some preliminary orders.

“Now, Chloe—I mean Aunt Dinah—do take Eunice—I mean Victorine and Una—away, and—you know—tidy them; and you, Sarah—it's Sarah, isn't it?—lay some refreshment in the parlour for this gentleman. And, Bob, tell your sister Cynthia to come here with Eunice.” As Bob still remained staring at Mr. Bowers, she added, in weary explanation, “Mr. Bowers brought me over from the Summit woods in his buggy—it was so hot. There—shake hands and thank him, and run away—do!”

They crossed a broad but scantily-furnished hall. Everywhere the same look of hopeless incompleteness, temporary utility, and premature decay; most of the furniture was mismatched and misplaced; many of the rooms had changed their original functions or doubled them; a smell of cooking came from the library, on whose shelves, mingled with books,

were dresses and household linen, and through the door of a room into which Mrs. Delatour retired to remove her duster Mr. Bowers caught a glimpse of a bed, and of a table covered with books and papers, at which a tall, fair girl was writing. In a few moments Mrs. Delatour returned, accompanied by this girl and Eunice, her short-lipped sister. Bob, who joined the party seated around Mr. Bowers and a table set with cake, a decanter, and glasses, completed the group. Emboldened by the presence of the tall Cynthia and his glimpse of her previous literary attitude, Mr. Bowers resolved to make one more attempt.

"I suppose these yer young ladies sometimes go to the wood, too?" As his eye rested on Cynthia, she replied—

"Oh yes."

"I reckon on account of the purty shadows down in the brush, and the soft light, eh? and all that?" he continued, with a playful manner but a serious accession of colour.

"Why, the woods belong to us. It's mar's property!" broke in Eunice with a flash of teeth.

"Well, Lordy, I wanter know!" said Mr. Bowers, in some astonishment. "Why, that's right in my line, too! I've been sightin' timber all along here, and that's how I dropped in on yer mar." Then, seeing a look of eagerness light up the faces of Bob and Eunice, he was encouraged to make the most of his opportunity. "Why, ma'am," he went on cheerfully, "I reckon you're holdin' that wood at a pretty stiff figger now."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Delatour simply.

Mr. Bowers delivered a wink at Bob and Eunice, who were still watching him with anxiety. "Well, not on account of the actool timber, for the best of it ain't sound," he said, "but on account of its bein' famous! Everybody that reads that pow'ful pretty poem about it in the *Excelsior Magazine* wants to see it. Why, it would pay the Green

Spring hotel-keeper to buy it up for his customers. But I s'pose you reckon to keep it—along with the poetess—in your famerly?"

Although Mr. Bowers long considered this speech as the happiest and most brilliant effort of his life, its immediate effect was not perhaps all that could be desired. The widow turned upon him a restrained and darkening face. Cynthia half rose with an appealing "Oh, mar!" and Bob and Eunice, having apparently pinched each other to the last stage of endurance, retired precipitately from the room in a prolonged giggle.

"I have not yet thought of disposing of the Summit woods, Mr. Bowers," said Mrs. Delatour coldly, "but if I should do so, I will consult you. You must excuse the children, who see so little company they are quite unmanageable when strangers are present. Cynthia, *will* you see if the servants have looked after Mr. Bowers's horse? You know Bob is not to be trusted."

There was clearly nothing else for Mr. Bowers to do but to take his leave, which he did respectfully, if not altogether hopefully. But when he had reached the lane his horse shied from the unwonted spectacle of Bob, swinging his hat and apparently awaiting him, from the fork of a wayside sapling.

"Hol' up, mister. Look here!"

Mr. Bowers pulled up. Bob dropped into the road, and, after a backward glance over his shoulder, said—

"Drive 'longside the fence in the shadder." As Mr. Bowers obeyed, Bob approached the wheels of the buggy in a manner half shy, half mysterious. "You wanter buy them Summit woods, mister?"

"Well, per'aps, sonny. Why?" smiled Mr. Bowers.

"'Cos I'll tell ye suthin'. Don't you be fooled into allowin' that Cynthia wrote that po'try. She didn't—no

more'n Eunice nor me. Mar kinder let ye think it, 'cos she don't want folks to think *she* did it. But mar wrote that po'try herself; wrote it out o' them thar woods—all by herself. Thar's a heap more po'try thar, you bet, and jist as good. And she's the one that kin write it—you hear me? That's my mar, every time! You buy that thar wood and get mar to run it for po'try, and you'll make your pile, sure! I ain't lyin'. You'd better look spry: thar's another feller snoopin' 'round yere—only he barked up the wrong tree, and thought it was Cynthia, jist as you did."

"Another feller?" repeated the astonished Bowers.

"Yes; a rig'lar sport. He was orful keen on that po'try, too, you bet. So you'd better hump yourself afore somebody else cuts in. Mar got a hundred dollars for that pome, from that editor feller and his pardner. I reckon that's the rig'lar price, eh?" he added, with a sudden suspicious caution.

"I reckon so," replied Mr. Bowers blankly. "But—look here, Bob! Do you mean to say it was your mother—your *mother*, Bob, who wrote that poem? Are you sure?"

"D'ye think I'm lyin'?" said Bob scornfully. "Don't I know? Don't I copy 'em out plain for her, so as folks won't know her handwrite? Go 'way! you're loony!" Then, possibly doubting if this latter expression were strictly diplomatic with the business in hand, he added, in half reproach, half apology, "Don't ye see I don't want ye to be fooled into losin' yer chance o' buying up that Summit wood? It's the cold truth I'm tellin' ye."

Mr. Bowers no longer doubted it. Disappointed as he undoubtedly was at first—and even self-deceived—he recognised in a flash the grim fact that the boy had stated. He recalled the apparition of the sad-faced woman in the wood—her distressed manner, that to his inexperienced mind now took upon itself the agitated trembling of dis-

turbed mystic inspiration. A sense of sadness and remorse succeeded his first shock of disappointment.

"Well, are ye going to buy the woods?" said Bob, eyeing him grimly. "Ye'd better say."

Mr. Bowers started. "I shouldn't wonder, Bob," he said, with a smile, gathering up his reins. "Anyhow, I'm comin' back to see your mother this afternoon. And meantime, Bob, you keep the first chance for me."

He drove away, leaving the youthful diplomatist standing with his bare feet in the dust. For a minute or two the young gentleman amused himself by a few light saltatory steps in the road. Then a smile of scornful superiority, mingled perhaps with a sense of previous slights and unappreciation, drew back his little upper lip and brightened his mottled cheek.

"I'd like ter know," he said darkly, "what this yer God-forsaken famerly would do without *me*?"

CHAPTER V.

IT is to be presumed that the editor and Mr. Hamlin mutually kept to their tacit agreement to respect the impersonality of the poetess, for during the next three months the subject was seldom alluded to by either. Yet in that period "White Violet" had sent two other contributions, and on each occasion Mr. Hamlin had insisted upon increasing the honorarium to the amount of his former gift. In vain the editor pointed out the danger of this form of munificence; Mr. Hamlin retorted by saying that if he refused he would appeal to the proprietor, who certainly would not object to taking the credit of this liberality. "As to the risks," concluded Jack sententiously, "I'll take them; and as far as you're concerned, you certainly get the worth of your money."

Indeed, if popularity was an indication, this had become suddenly true. For the poetess's third contribution, without changing its strong local colour and individuality, had been an unexpected outburst of human passion—a love-song, that touched those to whom the subtler meditative graces of the poetess had been unknown. Many people had listened to this impassioned but despairing cry from some remote and charmed solitude, who had never read poetry before, who translated it into their own limited vocabulary and more limited experience, and were inexpressibly affected to find that they too understood it; it was caught up and echoed by the feverish, adventurous, and unsatisfied life that filled that day and time. Even the editor was surprised and frightened. Like most cultivated men, he distrusted popularity; like all men who believe in their own individual judgment, he doubted collective wisdom. Yet, now that his *protégée* had been accepted by others, he questioned that judgment and became her critic. It struck him that her sudden outburst was strained; it seemed to him that in this mere contortion of passion the sibyl's robe had become rudely disarranged. He spoke to Hamlin, and even approached the tabooed subject.

"Did you see anything that suggested this sort of business in—in—that woman—I mean in—your pilgrimage, Jack?"

"No," responded Jack gravely. "But it's easy to see she's got hold of some hay-footed fellow up there in the mountains, with straws in his hair, and is playing him for all he's worth. You won't get much more poetry out of her, I reckon."

It was not long after this conversation that one afternoon, when the editor was alone, Mr. James Bowers entered the editorial room with much of the hesitation and irresolution of his previous visit. As the editor had not only forgotten him, but even dissociated him with the poetess, Mr. Bowers

was fain to meet his unresponsive eye and manner with some explanation.

"Ye disremember my comin' here, Mr. Editor, to ask you the name o' the lady who called herself 'White Violet,' and how you allowed you couldn't give it, but would write and ask for it?"

Mr. Editor, leaning back in his chair, now remembered the occurrence, but was distressed to add that the situation remained unchanged, and that he had received no such permission.

"Never mind *that*, my lad," said Mr. Bowers gravely, waving his hand. "I understand all that; but, ez I've known the lady ever since, and am now visiting her at her house on the Summit, I reckon it don't make much matter."

It was quite characteristic of Mr. Bowers's smileless earnestness that he made no ostentation of this dramatic retort, nor of the undisguised stupefaction of the editor.

"Do you mean to say that you have met 'White Violet,' the author of these poems?" repeated the editor.

"Which her name is Delatour—the widder Delatour—ez she has herself give me permission to tell to you," continued Mr. Bowers, with a certain abstracted and automatic precision that dissipated any suggestion of malice in the reversed situation.

"Delatour!—a widow!" repeated the editor.

"With five children," continued Mr. Bowers. Then, with unalterable gravity, he briefly gave an outline of her condition and the circumstances of his acquaintance with her.

"But I reckoned *you* might have known suthin' o' this, though she never let on you did," he concluded, eyeing the editor with troubled curiosity.

The editor did not think it necessary to implicate Mr. Hamlin. He said briefly, "I? Oh no!"

"Of course *you* might not have seen her?" said Mr. Bowers, keeping the same grave troubled gaze on the editor.

"Of course not," said the editor, somewhat impatient under the singular scrutiny of Mr. Bowers; "and I'm very anxious to know how she looks. Tell me, what is she like?"

"She is a fine, pow'ful, eddicated woman," said Mr. Bowers, with slow deliberation. "Yes, sir—a pow'ful woman, having grand ideas of her own, and holdin' to 'em." He had withdrawn his eyes from the editor, and apparently addressed the ceiling in confidence.

"But what does she look like, Mr. Bowers?" said the editor, smiling.

"Well, sir, she looks—*like—it!* Yes"—with deliberate caution—"I should say, just like it."

After a pause, apparently to allow the editor to materialise this ravishing description, he said gently, "Are you busy just now?"

"Not very. What can I do for you?"

"Well, not much for *me*, I reckon," he returned, with a deeper respiration, that was his nearest approach to a sigh, "but suthin' perhaps for yourself and—another. Are you married?"

"No," said the editor promptly.

"Nor engaged to any—young lady?"—with great politeness.

"No."

"Well, mebbe you think it a queer thing for me to say—mebbe you reckon you *know* it ez well ez anybody—but it's my opinion that 'White Violet' is in love with you."

"With me?" ejaculated the editor, in a hopeless astonishment that at last gave way to an incredulous and irresistible laugh.

A slight touch of pain passed over Mr. Bowers's dejected

face, but left the deep outlines set with a rude dignity. "It's so," he said slowly—"though, as a young man and a gay feller, ye may think it's funny."

"No, not funny, but a terrible blunder, Mr. Bowers, for I give you my word I know nothing of the lady, and have never set eyes upon her."

"No, but she has on *you*. I can't say," continued Mr. Bowers, with sublime *naïveté*, "that I'd ever recognise you from her description, but a woman o' that kind don't see with her eyes like you and me, but with all her senses to onct, and a heap more that ain't senses as we know 'em. The same eyes that seed down through the brush and ferns in the Summit woods, the same ears that heerd the music of the wind trailin' through the pines, don't see you with my eyes or hear you with my ears. And when she paints you, it's nat'ril for a woman with that pow'ful mind and grand idees to dip her brush into her heart's blood for warmth and colour. Yer smilin', young man. Well, go on and smile at me, my lad, but not at her. For you don't know her. When you know her story as I do, when you know she was made a wife afore she ever knew what it was to be a young woman, when you know that the man she married never understood the kind o' critter he was tied to no more than ef he'd been a steer yoked to a Morgan colt, when ye know she had children growin' up around her afore she had given over bein' a sort of child herself, when ye know she worked and slaved for that man and those children about the house—her heart, her soul, and all her pow'ful mind bein' all the time in the woods along with the flickerin' leaves and the shadders—when ye mind she couldn't get the small ways o' the ranch because she had the big ways o' Natur' that made it—then you'll understand her."

Impressed by the sincerity of his visitor's manner, touched by the unexpected poetry of his appeal, and yet keenly alive

to the absurdity of an incomprehensible blunder somewhere committed, the editor gasped almost hysterically—

“But why should all this make her in love with *me*?”

“Because ye are both gifted,” returned Mr. Bowers, with sad but unconquerable conviction; “because ye’re both, so to speak, in a line o’ idees and business that draws ye together—to lean on each other and trust each other ez pardners. Not that *ye* are ezakly her ekal,” he went on, with a return to his previous exasperating *naïveté*, “though I’ve heerd promisin’ things o’ ye, and ye’re still young, but in matters o’ this kind there is allers one ez hez to be looked up to by the other—and gin’rally the wrong one. She looks up to you, Mr. Editor—it’s part of her po’try—ez she looks down inter the brush and sees more than is plain to you and me. Not,” he continued, with a courteously deprecating wave of the hand, “ez you hain’t bin kind to her—mebbe *too* kind. For thar’s the purty letter you writ her, thar’s the perlite, easy, captivatin’ way you had with her girls and that boy—hold on!”—as the editor made a gesture of despairing renunciation—“I ain’t sayin’ you ain’t right in keepin’ it to yourself—and thar’s the extry money you sent her every time. Stop! she knows it was *extry*, for she made a p’int o’ gettin’ me to find out the market price o’ po’try in papers and magazines, and she reckons you’ve bin payin’ her four hundred per cent. above them figgers—hold on! I ain’t sayin’ it ain’t free and liberal in you, and I’d have done the same thing; yet *she* thinks——”

But the editor had risen hastily to his feet with flushing cheeks.

“One moment, Mr. Bowers,” he said hurriedly. “This is the most dreadful blunder of all. The gift is not mine. It was the spontaneous offering of another who really admired our friend’s work—a gentleman who——” He stopped suddenly.

The sound of a familiar voice, lightly humming, was borne along the passage; the light tread of a familiar foot was approaching. The editor turned quickly towards the open door—so quickly that Mr. Bowers was fain to turn also.

For a charming instant the figure of Jack Hamlin, handsome, careless, and confident, was framed in the doorway. His dark eyes, with their habitual scorn of his average fellow-man, swept superciliously over Mr. Bowers and rested for an instant with caressing familiarity on the editor.

"Well, sonny, any news from the old girl at the Summit?"

"No-o," hastily stammered the editor, with a half-hysterical laugh. "No, Jack. Excuse me a moment."

"All right; busy, I see. *Hasta manana.*"

The picture vanished, the frame was empty.

"You see," continued the editor, turning to Mr. Bowers, "there has been a mistake. I——" but he stopped suddenly at the ashen face of Mr. Bowers, still fixed in the direction of the vanished figure.

"Are you ill?"

Mr. Bowers did not reply, but slowly withdrew his eyes and turned them heavily on the editor. Then, drawing a longer, deeper breath, he picked up his soft felt hat, and, moulding it into shape in his hands as if preparing to put it on, he moistened his dry, greyish lips, and said gently—

"Friend o' yours?"

"Yes," said the editor—"Jack Hamlin. Of course, you know him?"

"Yes."

Mr. Bowers here put his hat on his head, and, after a pause, turned round slowly once or twice, as if he had forgotten it and was still seeking it. Finally he succeeded in finding the editor's hand, and shook it, albeit his own trembled slightly. Then he said—

"I reckon you're right. There's bin a mistake. I see it

now. Good-bye. If you're ever up my way, drop in and see me." He then walked to the doorway, passed out, and seemed to melt into the afternoon shadows of the hall.

He never again entered the office of the *Excelsior Magazine*, neither was any further contribution ever received from "White Violet." To a polite entreaty from the editor, addressed first to "White Violet" and then to Mrs. Delatour, there was no response. The thought of Mr. Hamlin's cynical prophecy disturbed him, but that gentleman, preoccupied in filling some professional engagements in Sacramento, gave him no chance to acquire further explanations as to the past or the future. The youthful editor was at first in despair, and filled with a vague remorse of some unfulfilled duty. But, to his surprise, the readers of the magazine seemed to survive their talented contributor, and the feverish life that had been thrilled by her song in two months had apparently forgotten her. Nor was her voice lifted from any alien quarter; the domestic and foreign press that had echoed her lays seemed to respond no longer to her utterance.

It is possible that some readers of these pages may remember a previous chronicle by the same historian, wherein it was recorded that the volatile spirit of Mr. Jack Hamlin, slightly assisted by circumstances, passed beyond these voices at the Ranch of the Blessed Fisherman, some two years later. As the editor stood beside the body of his friend on the morning of the funeral, he noticed among the flowers laid upon his bier by loving hands a wreath of white violets. Touched and disturbed by a memory long since forgotten, he was further embarrassed, as the *cortège* dispersed in the Mission graveyard, by the apparition of the tall figure of Mr. James Bowers from behind a monumental column. The editor turned to him quickly.

"I am glad to see you here," he said awkwardly, and he knew not why; then, after a pause, "I trust you can give

me some news of Mrs. Delatour. I wrote to her nearly two years ago, but had no response."

"Thar's bin no Mrs. Delatour for two years," said Mr. Bowers, contemplatively stroking his beard; "and mebbe that's why. She's bin for two years Mrs. Bowers."

"I congratulate you," said the editor; "but I hope there still remains a 'White Violet,' and that, for the sake of literature, she has not given up——"

"Mrs. Bowers," interrupted Mr. Bowers, with singular deliberation, "found that makin' po'try and tendin' to the cares of a growin' up famerly was irritatin' to the narves. They didn't jibe, so to speak. What Mrs. Bowers wanted—and what, po'try or no po'try, I've bin tryin' to give her—was Rest! She's bin' havin' it comfor'bly up at my ranch at Mendocino, with her children and me. Yes, sir,"—his eye wandered accidentally to the new-made grave—"you'll excuse my sayin' it to a man in your profession, but it's what most folks will find is a heap better than readin' or writin' or actin' po'try—and that's—Rest!"

The Châtelaine of Burnt Ridge.

CHAPTER I.

IT had grown dark on Burnt Ridge. Seen from below, the whole serrated crest that had glittered in the sunset as if its interstices were eaten by consuming fires, now closed up its ranks of blackened shafts and became again harsh and sombre *chevaux de frise* against the sky. A faint glow still lingered over the red valley road as if it were its own reflection, rather than any light from beyond the darkened ridge. Night was already creeping up out of remote cañons and along the furrowed flanks of the mountain, or settling on the nearer woods with the sound of home-coming and innumerable wings. At a point where the road began to encroach upon the mountain-side in its slow winding ascent the darkness had become so real that a young girl cantering along the rising terrace found difficulty in guiding her horse, with eyes still dazzled by the sunset fires.

In spite of her precautions, the animal suddenly shied at some object in the obscured roadway, and nearly unseated her. The accident disclosed not only the fact that she was riding in a man's saddle, but also a foot and ankle that her ordinary walking-dress was too short to hide. It was evident that her equestrian exercise was extempore, and that at that hour and on that road she had not expected to meet company. But she was apparently a good horsewoman, for the mischance that might have thrown a less practical or more timid

rider seemed of little moment to her. With a strong hand and determined gesture she wheeled her frightened horse back into the track, and rode him directly at the object. But here she herself slightly recoiled—for it was the body of a man lying in the road.

As she leaned forward over her horse's shoulder she could see by the dim light that he was a miner, and that, though motionless, he was breathing stertorously. Drunk, no doubt!—an accident of the locality alarming only to her horse. But although she cantered impatiently forward, she had not proceeded a hundred yards before she stopped reflectively and trotted back again. He had not moved. She could now see that his head and shoulders were covered with broken clods of earth and gravel, and smaller fragments lay at his side. A dozen feet above him on the hillside there was a foot trail which ran parallel with the bridle-road, and occasionally overhung it. It seemed possible that he might have fallen from the trail and been stunned.

Dismounting, she succeeded in dragging him to a safer position by the bank. The act discovered his face, which was young, and unknown to her. Wiping it with the silk handkerchief which was loosely slung around his neck after the fashion of his class, she gave a quick feminine glance around her, and then approached her own and rather handsome face near his lips. There was no odour of alcohol in the thick and heavy respiration. Mounting again, she rode forward at an accelerated pace, and in twenty minutes had reached a higher table-land of the mountain, a cleared opening in the forest that showed signs of careful cultivation, and a large, rambling, yet picturesque-looking dwelling, whose unpainted red-wood walls were hidden in roses and creepers. Pushing open a swinging gate, she entered the enclosure as a brown-faced man, dressed as a vaquero, came towards her as if to assist her to alight. But she

had already leaped to the ground and thrown him the reins.

"Miguel," she said, with a mistress's quiet authority in her boyish contralto voice, "put Glory in the covered waggon, and drive down the road as far as the valley turning. There's a man lying near the right bank, drunk, or sick maybe, or perhaps crippled by a fall. Bring him up here, unless somebody has found him already, or you happen to know who he is and where to take him."

The vaquero raised his shoulders, half in deprecation, half in disappointed expectation of some other command. "And your brother, señora, he has not himself arrived?"

A light shadow of impatience crossed her face. "No," she said bluntly. "Come, be quick."

She turned towards the house as the man moved away. Already a gaunt-looking old man had appeared in the porch, and was awaiting her with his hand shadowing his angry, suspicious eyes, and his lips moving querulously.

"Of course, you've got to stand out there and give orders and 'tend to your own business afore you think o' speaking to your own flesh and blood," he said aggrievedly. "That's all *you* care!"

"There was a sick man lying in the road, and I've sent Miguel to look after him," returned the girl, with a certain contemptuous resignation.

"Oh yes!" struck in another voice, which seemed to belong to the female of the first speaker's species, and to be its equal in age and temper, "and I reckon you saw a jay-bird on a tree, or asquirrel on the fence, and either of 'em was more important to you than your own brother."

"Steve didn't come by the stage, and didn't send any message," continued the young girl, with the same coldly resigned manner. "No one had any news of him, and, as I told you before, I didn't expect any."

"Why don't you say right out you didn't *want* any?" said the old man sneeringly. "Much you inquired! No; I orter hev gone myself, and I would if I was master here, instead of me and your mother bein' the dust of the yearth beneath your feet."

The young girl entered the house, followed by the old man, passing an old woman seated by the window, who seemed to be nursing her resentment and a large Bible which she held clasped against her shawled bosom at the same moment. Going to the wall, she hung up her large hat and slightly shook the red dust from her skirts as she continued her explanation, in the same deep voice, with a certain monotony of logic and possibly of purpose and practice also.

"You and mother know as well as I do, father, that Stephen is no more to be depended upon than the wind that blows. It's three years since he set foot here; it's three years since he has been promising to come, and even getting money to come, and yet he has never showed his face, though he has been a dozen times within five miles of this house. He doesn't come, because he doesn't want to come. As to *your* going over to the stage-office, I went there myself at the last moment to save you the mortification of asking questions of strangers that they know have been a dozen times answered already."

There was such a ring of absolute truthfulness, albeit worn by repetition, in the young girl's deep honest voice, that for one instant her two more emotional relatives quailed before it; but only for a moment.

"That's right!" shrilled the old woman. "Go on and abuse your own brother. It's only the fear you have that he'll make his fortune yet and shame you before the father and mother you despise."

The young girl remained standing by the window motion-

less and apparently passive, as if receiving an accepted and usual punishment. But here the elder woman gave way to sobs and some incoherent snuffling, at which the younger went away. Whether she recognised in her mother's tears the ordinary deliquescence of emotion, or whether, as a woman herself, she knew that this mere feminine conventionality could not possibly be directed at her, and that the actual conflict between them had ceased, she passed slowly on to an inner hall, leaving the male victim, her unfortunate father, to succumb, as he always did sooner or later, to their influence. Crossing the hall, which was decorated with a few elk horns, Indian trophies, and mountain pelts, she entered another room, and closed the door behind her with a gesture of relief.

The room, which looked upon a porch, presented a singular combination of masculine business occupations and feminine taste and adornment. A desk covered with papers, a shelf displaying a ledger and account-books, another containing works of reference, a table with a vase of flowers and a lady's riding-whip upon it, a map of California flanked on either side by an embroidered silken workbag and an oval mirror decked with grasses, a calendar and interest-table hanging below two schoolgirl crayons of classic heads, with the legend, "*Josephine Forsyth fecit*"—were part of its incongruous accessories. The young girl went to her desk, but presently moved and turned towards the window thoughtfully. The last gleam had died from the steel-blue sky; a few lights like star points began to prick out the lower valley. The expression of monotonous restraint and endurance had not yet faded from her face.

Yet she had been accustomed to scenes like the one she had just passed through since her girlhood. Five years ago Alexander Forsyth, her uncle, had brought her to this spot—then a mere log cabin on the hillside—as a refuge from

the impoverished and shiftless home of his elder brother Thomas and his ill-tempered wife. Here Alexander Forsyth, by reason of his more dominant character and business capacity, had prospered until he became a rich and influential ranche owner. Notwithstanding her father's jealousy of Alexander's fortune, and the open rupture that followed between the brothers, Josephine retained her position in the heart and home of her uncle without espousing the cause of either; and her father was too prudent not to recognise the near and prospective advantages of such a mediator. Accustomed to her parents' extravagant denunciations, and her uncle's more repressed but practical contempt of them, the unfortunate girl early developed a cynical disbelief in the virtues of kinship in the abstract, and a philosophical resignation to its effects upon her personally. Believing that her father and uncle fairly represented the fraternal principle, she was quite prepared for the early defection and distrust of her vagabond and dissipated brother Stephen, and accepted it calmly. True to an odd standard of justice, which she had erected from the crumbling ruins of her own domestic life, she was tolerant of everything but human perfection. This quality, however fatal to her higher growth, had given her a peculiar capacity for business which endeared her to her uncle. Familiar with the strong passions and prejudices of men, she had none of those feminine meannesses, a wholesome distrust of which had kept her uncle a bachelor. It was not strange, therefore, that when he died two years ago it was found that he had left her his entire property, real and personal, limited only by a single condition. She was to undertake the vocation of a "sole trader," and carry on the business under the name of "J. Forsyth." If she married, the estate and property was to be held distinct from her husband's, inalienable under the "Married Woman's Property Act," and subject during

her life only to her own control and personal responsibilities as a trader.

The intense disgust and discomfiture of her parents, who had expected to more actively participate in their brother's fortune, may be imagined. But it was not equal to their fury when Josephine, instead of providing for them a separate maintenance out of her abundance, simply offered to transfer them and her brother to her own house on a domestic but not a business equality. There being no alternative but their former precarious shiftless life in their "played out" claim in the valley, they wisely consented, reserving the sacred right of daily protest and objurgation. In the economy of Burnt Ridge Rancho they alone took it upon themselves to represent the shattered domestic altar and its outraged Lares and Penates. So conscientiously did they perform their task as to even occasionally impede the business visitor to the rancho, and to cause some of the more practical neighbours to seriously doubt the young girl's commercial wisdom. But she was firm. Whether she thought her parents a necessity of respectable domesticity, or whether she regarded their presence in the light of a penitential atonement for some previous disregard of them, no one knew. Public opinion inclined to the latter.

The black line of ridge faded out with her abstraction, and she turned from the window and lit the lamp on her desk. The yellow light illuminated her face and figure. In their womanly graces there was no trace of what some people believed to be a masculine character, except a singularly frank look of critical inquiry and patient attention in her dark eyes. Her long brown hair was somewhat rigidly twisted into a knot on the top of her head, as if more for security than ornament. Brown was also the prevailing tint of her eyebrows, thickly-set eyelashes, and eyes, and was even suggested in the slight sallowness of her complexion.

But her lips were well-cut and fresh-coloured, and her hands and feet small and finely formed. She would have passed for a pretty girl had she not suggested something more.

She sat down, and began to examine a pile of papers before her with that concentration and attention to detail which was characteristic of her eyes, pausing at times with prettily knit brows, and her penholder between her lips, in the semblance of a pout that was pleasant enough to see. Suddenly the rattle of hoofs and wheels struck her with a sense of something forgotten, and she put down her work quickly and stood up listening. The sound of rough voices and her father's querulous accents was broken upon by a cultivated and more familiar utterance: "All right; I'll speak to her at once. Wait there," and the door opened to the well-known physician of Burnt Ridge, Dr. Duchesne.

"Look here," he said, with an abruptness that was only saved from being brusque by a softer intonation and a reassuring smile, "I met Miguel helping an accident into your buggy. Your orders, eh?"

"Oh yes," said Josephine quietly. "A man I saw on the road."

"Well, it's a bad case, and wants prompt attention. And as your house is the nearest, I came with him here."

"Certainly," she said gravely. "Take him to the second room beyond—Steve's room—it's ready," she explained to two dusky shadows in the hall behind the doctor.

"And look here," said the doctor, partly closing the door behind him and regarding her with critical eyes—"you always said you'd like to see some of my queer cases. Well, this is one—a serious one, too; in fact, it's just touch and go with him. There's a piece of the bone pressing on the brain no bigger than that, but as much as if all Burnt Ridge was atop of him! I'm going to lift it. I want somebody here to stand by, some one who can lend a hand with a

sponge, eh?—some one who isn't going to faint or scream, or even shake a hair's breadth, eh?"

The colour rose quickly to the girl's cheek, and her eyes kindled. "I'll come," she said thoughtfully. "Who is he?"

The doctor stared slightly at the unessential query. "Don't know; one of the river miners, I reckon. It's an urgent case. I'll go and get everything ready. You'd better," he added, with an ominous glance at her grey frock, "put something over your dress." The suggestion made her grave, but did not alter her colour.

A moment later she entered the room. It was the one that had always been set apart for her brother; the very bed on which the unconscious man lay had been arranged that morning with her own hands. Something of this passed through her mind as she saw that the doctor had wheeled it beneath the strong light in the centre of the room, stripped its outer coverings with professional thoughtfulness, and rearranged the mattresses. But it did not seem like the same room. There was a pungent odour in the air from some freshly-opened phial; an almost feminine neatness and luxury in an open morocco case like a jewel-box on the table, shining with spotless steel. At the head of the bed one of her own servants, the powerful mill foreman, was assisting with the mingled curiosity and *blasé* experience of one accustomed to smashed and lacerated digits. At first she did not look at the central unconscious figure on the bed, whose sufferings seemed to her to have been vicariously transferred to the concerned, eager, and drawn faces that looked down upon its immunity. Then she femininely recoiled before the bared white neck and shoulders displayed above the quilt, until, forcing herself to look upon the face half concealed by bandages, and the head from which the dark tangles of hair had been ruthlessly sheared,

she began to share the doctor's unconcern in his personality. What mattered who or what *he* was? It was—a case!

The operation began. With the same earnest intelligence she had previously shown, she quickly and noiselessly obeyed the doctor's whispered orders, and even half anticipated them. She was conscious of a singular curiosity that, far from being mean or ignoble, seemed to lift her not only above the ordinary weaknesses of her own sex, but made her superior to the men around her. Almost before she knew it, the operation was over, and she regarded with equal curiosity the ostentatious solicitude with which the doctor seemed to be wiping his fateful instrument, that bore an odd resemblance to a silver-handled centre-bit. The stertorous breathing below the bandages had given way to a fainter but more natural respiration. There was a moment of suspense. The doctor's hand left the pulse and lifted the closed eyelid of the sufferer. A slight movement passed over the figure. The sluggish face had cleared, life seemed to struggle back into it before even the dull eyes participated in the glow. Dr. Duchesne with a sudden gesture waved aside his companions, but not before Josephine had bent her head eagerly forward.

"He is coming to," she said.

At the sound of that deep clear voice—the first to break the hush of the room—the dull eyes leaped up and the head turned in its direction. The lips moved and uttered a single rapid sentence. The girl recoiled.

"You're all right now," said the doctor cheerfully, intent only upon the form before him.

The lips moved again, but this time feebly and vacantly; the eyes were staring vaguely around.

"What's matter? What's all about?" said the man thickly.

"You've had a fall. Think a moment. Where do you live?"

Again the lips moved, but this time only to emit a confused, incoherent murmur. Dr. Duchesne looked grave, but recovered himself quickly.

"That will do. Leave him alone now," he said brusquely to the others.

But Josephine lingered.

"He spoke well enough just now," she said eagerly. "Did you hear what he said?"

"Not exactly," said the doctor abstractedly, gazing at the man.

"He said, 'You'll have to kill me first,'" said Josephine slowly.

"Humph," said the doctor abstractedly, passing his hand backwards and forwards before the man's eyes to note any change in the staring pupils.

"Yes," continued Josephine gravely. "I suppose," she added cautiously, "he was thinking of the operation—of what you had just done to him?"

"What *I* had done to him? Oh yes!"

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE noon the next day it was known throughout Burnt Ridge Valley that Dr. Duchesne had performed a difficult operation upon an unknown man, who had been picked up unconscious from a fall, and carried to Burnt Ridge Rancho. But although the unfortunate man's life was saved by the operation, he had only momentarily recovered consciousness—relapsing into a semi-idiotic state, which effectively stopped the discovery of any clue to his friends or his identity. As it was evidently an *accident*, which, in that rude community—and even in some more civilised ones—conveyed a vague impression of some contributory incapacity on the part of

the victim, or some Providential interference of a retributive character, Burnt Ridge gave itself little trouble about it. It is unnecessary to say that Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth gave themselves and Josephine much more. They had a theory and a grievance. Satisfied from the first that the alleged victim was a drunken tramp, who submitted to have a hole bored in his head in order to foist himself upon the ranche, they were loud in their protests, even hinting at a conspiracy between Josephine and the stranger to supplant her brother in the property, as he had already in the spare bedroom. "Didn't all that yer happen *the very night* she pretended to go for Stephen—eh?" said Mrs. Forsyth. "Tell me that! And didn't she have it all arranged with the buggy to bring him here, as that sneaking doctor himself let out—eh? Looks mighty curious, don't it?" she muttered darkly to the old man. But although that gentleman, even from his own selfish view, would scarcely have submitted to a surgical operation and later idiocy as the price of insuring comfortable dependency, he had no doubt others were base enough to do it, and lent a willing ear to his wife's suspicions.

Josephine's personal knowledge of the stranger went little further. Doctor Duchesne had confessed to her his professional disappointment at the incomplete results of the operation. He had saved the man's life, but as yet not his reason. There was still hope, however, for the diagnosis revealed nothing that might prejudice a favourable progress. It was a most interesting case. He would watch it carefully, and as soon as the patient could be removed would take him to the county hospital, where, under his own eyes, the poor fellow would have the benefit of the latest science and the highest specialists. Physically he was doing remarkably well; indeed, he must have been a fine young chap, free from blood taint or vicious complication, whose flesh had healed like an infant's. It should be recorded

that it was at this juncture that Mrs. Forsyth first learnt that a *silver plate* let into the artful stranger's skull was an adjunct of the healing process! Convinced that this infamous extravagance was part and parcel of the conspiracy, and was only the beginning of other assimilations of the Forsyths' metallic substance; that the plate was probably polished and burnished with a fulsome inscription to the doctor's skill, and would pass into the possession and adornment of a perfect stranger, her rage knew no bounds. He or his friends ought to be made to pay for it or work it out! In vain it was declared that a few dollars were all that was found in the man's pocket, and that no memoranda gave any indication of his name, friends, or history beyond the suggestion that he came from a distance. This was clearly a part of the conspiracy! Even Josephine's practical good sense was obliged to take note of this singular absence of all record regarding him, and the apparent obliteration of everything that might be responsible for his ultimate fate.

Homeless, friendless, helpless, and even nameless, the unfortunate man of twenty-five was thus left to the tender mercies of the mistress of Burnt Ridge Rancho as if he had been a new-born foundling laid at her door. But this mere claim of weakness was not all; it was supplemented by a singular personal appeal to Josephine's nature. From the time that he turned his head towards her voice on that fateful night his eyes had always followed her around the room with a wondering, yearning, canine half-intelligence. Without being able to convince herself that he understood her better than his regular attendant furnished by the doctor, she could not fail to see that he obeyed her implicitly, and that whenever any difficulty arose between him and his nurse she was always appealed to. Her pride in this proof of her practical sovereignty was flattered; and when Doctor Duchesne finally admitted that although the patient was

now physically able to be removed to the hospital, yet he would lose in the change that very strong factor which Josephine had become in his mental recovery, the young girl as frankly suggested that he should stay as long as there was any hope of restoring his reason. Doctor Duchesne was delighted. With all his enthusiasm for science, he had a professional distrust of some of its disciples, and perhaps was not sorry to keep this most interesting case in his own hands. To him her suggestion was only a womanly kindness, tempered with womanly curiosity. But the astonishment and stupefaction of her parents at this evident corroboration of suspicions they had as yet only half believed, was tinged with superstitious dread. Had she fallen in love with this helpless stranger? or, more awful to contemplate, was he really no stranger, but a surreptitious lover thus strategically brought under her roof? For once they refrained from open criticism. The very magnitude of their suspicion left them dumb.

It was thus that the virgin Châtelaine of Burnt Ridge Rancho was left to gaze untrammelled upon her pale and handsome guest, whose silken-bearded lips and sad child-like eyes might have suggested a more exalted Sufferer in their absence of any suggestion of a grosser material manhood. But even this imaginative appeal did not enter into her feelings. She felt for her good-looking, helpless patient a profound and honest pity. I do not know whether she had ever heard that "pity was akin to love." She would probably have resented that utterly untenable and atrocious commonplace. There was no suggestion, real or illusive, of any previous masterful quality in the man which might have made his present dependent condition picturesque by contrast. He had come to her handicapped by an unromantic accident and a practical want of energy and intellect. He would have to touch her interest anew if,

indeed, he would ever succeed in dispelling the old impression. His beauty, in a community of picturesquely handsome men, had little weight with her, except to accent the contrast with their fuller manhood.

Her life had given her no illusions in regard to the other sex. She had found them, however, more congenial and safer companions than women, and more accessible to her own sense of justice and honour. In return they had respected and admired rather than loved her, in spite of her womanly graces. If she had at times contemplated eventual marriage, it was only as a possible practical partnership in her business; but as she lived in a country where men thought it dishonourable and a proof of incompetency to rise by their wives' superior fortune, she had been free from that kind of mercenary persecution, even from men who might have worshipped her in hopeless and silent honour.

For this reason there was nothing in the situation that suggested a single compromising speculation in the minds of the neighbours, or disturbed her own tranquillity. There seemed to be nothing in the future except a possible relief to her curiosity. Some day the unfortunate man's reason would be restored, and he would tell his simple history. Perhaps he might explain what was in his mind when he turned to her the first evening with that singular sentence which had often recurred strangely to her, she knew not why. It did not strike her until later that it was because it had been the solitary indication of an energy and capacity that seemed unlike him. Nevertheless, after that explanation she would have been quite willing to have shaken hands with him and parted.

And yet—for there was an unexpressed remainder in her thought—she was never entirely free or uninfluenced in his presence. The flickering vacancy of his sad eyes sometimes became fixed with a resolute immobility under the gentle

questioning with which she had sought to draw out his faculties, that both piqued and exasperated her. He could say "yes" and "no," as she thought, intelligently, but he could not utter a coherent sentence nor write a word, except like a child in imitation of his copy. She taught him to repeat after her the names of the inanimate objects in the room, then the names of the doctor, his attendant, the servant, and finally her own under her Christian prenomén, with frontier familiarity; but when she pointed to himself he waited for *her* to name him! In vain she tried him with all the masculine names she knew; his was not one of them, or he would not or could not speak it. For at times she rejected the professional dictum of the doctor that the faculty of memory was wholly paralysed or held in abeyance, even to the half-automatic recollection of his letters, yet she inconsistently began to teach him the alphabet with the same method, and—in her sublime unconsciousness of his manhood—with the same discipline as if he were a very child. When he had recovered sufficiently to leave his room, she would lead him to the porch before her window, and make him contented and happy by allowing him to watch her at work at her desk, occasionally answering his wondering eyes with a word, or stirring his faculties with a question. I grieve to say that her parents had taken advantage of this publicity and his supposed helpless condition to show their disgust of his assumption, to the extreme of making faces at him—an act which he resented with such a furious glare that they retreated hurriedly to their own verandah. A fresh though somewhat inconsistent grievance was added to their previous indictment of him: "If we ain't found dead in our bed with our throats cut by that woman's crazy husband" (they had settled by this time that there had been a clandestine marriage), "we'll be lucky," groaned Mrs. Forsyth.

Meantime the mountain summer waxed to its fulness of fire and fruition. There were days when the crowded forest seemed choked and impeded with its own foliage, and pungent and stifling with its own rank maturity; when the long hillside ranks of wild oats, thick-set and impassable, filled the air with the heated dust of germination. In this quickening irritation of life it would be strange if the unfortunate man's torpid intellect was not helped in its awakening, and he was allowed to ramble at will over the ranche; but with the instinct of a domestic animal he always returned to the house and sat in the porch, where Josephine usually found him awaiting her when she herself returned from a visit to the mill. Coming thence one day, she espied him on the mountain-side leaning against a projecting ledge in an attitude so rapt and immovable that she felt compelled to approach him. He appeared to be dumbly absorbed in the prospect, which might have intoxicated a saner mind.

Half veiled by the heat that rose quiveringly from the fiery cañon below, the domain of Burnt Ridge stretched away before him, until, lifted in successive terraces hearsed and plumed with pines, it was at last lost in the ghostly snow-peaks. But the practical Josephine seized the opportunity to try once more to awaken the slumbering memory of her pupil. Following his gaze, with signs and questions she sought to draw from him some indication of familiar recollection of certain points of the map thus unrolled behind him. But in vain. She even pointed out the fateful shadow of the overhanging ledge on the road where she had picked him up—there was no response in his abstracted eyes. She bit her lips; she was becoming irritated again. Then it occurred to her that, instead of appealing to his hopeless memory, she had better trust to some unreflective automatic instinct independent of it, and she put the question a little forward: "When you leave us,

where will you go from here?" He stirred slightly, and turned towards her. She repeated her query slowly and patiently, with signs and gestures recognised between them. A faint glow of intelligence struggled into his eyes; he lifted his arm slowly and pointed.

"Ah! those white peaks—the Sierras?" she asked eagerly. No reply. "Beyond them?"

"Yes."

"The States?" No reply. "Farther still?"

He remained so patiently quiet and still pointing, that she leaned forward, and, following with her eyes the direction of his hand, saw that he was pointing to the sky!

Then a great quiet fell upon them. The whole mountain-side seemed to her to be hushed as if to allow her to grasp and realise for the first time the pathos of the ruined life at her side, which *it* had known so long, but which she had never felt till now. The tears came to her eyes; in her swift revulsion of feeling she caught the thin uplifted hand between her own. It seemed to her that he was about to raise them to his lips, but she withdrew them hastily, and moved away. She had a strange fear that if he had kissed them it might seem as if some dumb animal had touched them—or—*it might not*. The next day she felt a consciousness of this in his presence, and a wish that he was well cured and away. She determined to consult Dr. Duchesne on the subject when he next called.

But the doctor, secure in the welfare of his patient, had not visited him lately, and she found herself presently absorbed in the business of the ranche, which at this season was particularly trying. There had also been a quarrel between Dick Shipley, her mill foreman, and Miguel, her ablest and most trusted vaquero, and in her strict sense of impartial justice she was obliged to side on the merits of the case with Shipley against her oldest retainer. This troubled her,

as she knew that with the Mexican nature, fidelity and loyalty were not unmixed with quick and unreasoning jealousy. For this reason she was somewhat watchful of the two men when work was over and there was a chance of their being thrown together. Once or twice she had remained up late to meet Miguel returning from the Posada at San Ramon, filled with *aguardiente* and a recollection of his wrongs, and to see him safely bestowed before she herself retired. It was on one of those occasions, however, that she learned that Dick Shipley, hearing that Miguel had disparaged him freely at the Posada, had broken the discipline of the ranche and absented himself the same night that Miguel "had leave" with a view of facing his antagonist on his own ground. To prevent this the fearless girl at once secretly set out alone to overtake and bring back the delinquent.

For two or three hours the house was thus left to the sole occupancy of Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth and the invalid—a fact only dimly suspected by the latter, who had become vaguely conscious of Josephine's anxiety, and had noticed the absence of light and movement in her room. It was therefore that, having risen again and mechanically taken his seat in the porch to await her return, he was startled by hearing *her* voice in the shadow of the lower porch, accompanied by a hurried tapping against the door of the old couple. The half-reasoning man arose and would have moved towards it, but suddenly he stopped rigidly, with white and parted lips and vacantly distended eyeballs.

Meantime the voice and muffled tapping had brought the tremulous fingers of old Forsyth to the door-latch. He opened the door partly; a slight figure that had been lurking in the shadow of the porch pushed rapidly through the opening. There was a faint outcry quickly hushed, and the door closed again. The rays of a single candle showed the two old people hysterically clasping in their arms the figure that

had entered—a slight but vicious-looking young fellow of five-and-twenty.

"There, d—n it!" he said impatiently, in a voice whose rich depth was like Josephine's, but whose querulous action was that of the two old people before him, "let me go, and quit that. I didn't come here to be strangled? I want some money—money, you hear! Devilish quick, too, for I've got to be off again before daylight. So look sharp, will you?"

"But, Stevy dear, when you didn't come that time three months ago, but wrote from Los Angeles, you said you'd made a strike at last, and——"

"What are you talking about?" he interrupted violently. "That was just my lyin' to keep you from worryin' me. Three months ago—three months ago! Why, you must have been crazy to have swallowed it; I hadn't a cent."

"Nor have we," said the old woman shrilly. "That hellish sister of yours still keeps us like beggars. Our only hope was you, our own boy. And now you only come to—to go again."

"But *she* has money; *she's* doing well, and *she* shall give it to me," he went on angrily. "She can't bully me with her business airs and morality. Who else has got a right to share, if it is not her own brother?"

Alas for the fatuousness of human malevolence! Had the unhappy couple related only the simple facts they knew about the new guest of Burnt Ridge Rancho, and the manner of his introduction, they might have spared what followed.

But the old woman broke into a vindictive cry, "Who else, Steve—who else? Why, the slut has brought a *man* here—a sneaking, deceitful, underhanded, crazy lover!"

"Oh, has she?" said the young man fiercely, yet secretly pleased at this promising evidence of his sister's human weakness. "Where is she? I'll go to her. She's in her room, I suppose," and before they could restrain him, he

had thrown off their impeding embraces and darted across the hall.

The two old people stared doubtfully at each other. For even this powerful ally, whose strength, however, they were by no means sure of, might succumb before the determined Josephine! Prudence demanded a middle course. "Ain't they brother and sister?" said the old man, with an air of virtuous toleration. "Let 'em fight it out."

The young man impatiently entered the room he remembered to have been his sister's. By the light of the moon that streamed upon the window he could see she was not there. He passed hurriedly to the door of her bedroom; it was open; the room was empty, the bed unturned. She was not in the house—she had gone to the mill. Ah! What was that they had said! An infamous thought passed through the scoundrel's mind. Then, in what he half believed was an access of virtuous fury, he began by the dim light to rummage in the drawers of the desk for such loose coin or valuables as, in the perfect security of the ranche, were often left unguarded. Suddenly he heard a heavy footstep on the threshold, and turned.

An awful vision—a recollection, so unexpected, so ghost-like in that weird light that he thought he was losing his senses—stood before him. It moved forwards with staring eyeballs and white and open lips from which a horrible inarticulate sound issued that was the speech of no living man! With a single desperate, almost superhuman effort Stephen Forsyth bounded aside, leaped from the window, and ran like a madman from the house. Then the apparition trembled, collapsed, and sank in an undistinguishable heap to the ground.

When Josephine Forsyth returned an hour later with her mill foreman, she was startled to find her helpless patient in a fit on the floor of her room. With the assistance of

her now converted and penitent employé, she had the unfortunate man conveyed to his room—but not until she had thoughtfully rearranged the disorder of her desk and closed the open drawers without attracting Dick Shipley's attention. In the morning, hearing that the patient was still in the semi-conscious exhaustion of his late attack, but without seeing him, she sent for Dr. Duchesne. The doctor arrived while she was absent at the mill, where, after a careful examination of his patient, he sought her with some little excitement.

"Well?" she said with eager gravity.

"Well, it looks as if your wish would be gratified. Your friend has had an epileptic fit, but the physical shock has started his mental machinery again. He has recovered his faculties: his memory is returning; he thinks and speaks coherently; he is as sane as you and I."

"And—" said Josephine questioning the doctor's knitted eyebrows.

"I am not yet sure whether it was the result of some shock he doesn't remember, or an irritation of the brain, which would indicate that the operation had not been successful, and that there was still some physical pressure or obstruction there—in which case he would be subject to these attacks all his life."

"Do you think his reason came before the fit or after?" asked the girl anxiously.

"I couldn't say. Had anything happened?"

"I was away, and found him on the floor on my return," she answered half uneasily. After a pause she said, "Then he has told you his name, and all about himself?"

"Yes; it's nothing at all! He was a stranger just arrived from the States, going to the mines—the old story; had no near relations, of course; wasn't missed or asked after; remembers walking along the ridge and falling over; name,

John Baxter of Maine." He paused, and relaxing into a slight smile, added, "I haven't spoiled your romance, have I?"

"No," she said, with an answering smile. Then as the doctor walked briskly away she slightly knitted her pretty brows, hung her head, patted the ground with her little foot beyond the hem of her gown, and said to herself, "The man was lying to him."

CHAPTER III.

ON her return to the house, Josephine apparently contented herself with receiving the bulletin of the stranger's condition from the servant, for she did not enter his room. She had obtained no theory of last night's incident from her parents, who, beyond a querulous agitation that was quickened by the news of his return to reason, refrained from even that insidious comment which she half feared would follow. When another day passed without her seeing him, she nevertheless was conscious of a little embarrassment when his attendant brought her the request that she would give him a moment's speech in the porch, whither he had been removed.

She found him physically weaker; indeed, so much so that she was fain, even in her embarrassment, to assist him back to the bench from which he had ceremoniously risen. But she was so struck with the change in his face and manner, a change so virile and masterful, in spite of its gentle sadness of manner, that she recoiled with a slight timidity as if he had been a stranger, although she was also conscious that he seemed to be more at his ease than she was. He began in a low exhausted voice, but before he had finished his first sentence she felt herself in the presence of a superior.

"My thanks come very late, Miss Forsyth," he said, with a faint smile ; " but no one knows better than yourself the reason why, or can better understand that they mean that the burden you have so generously taken on yourself is about to be lifted. I know all, Miss Forsyth. Since yesterday I have learned how much I owe you—even my life, I believe, though I am afraid I must tell you in the same breath that *that* is of little worth to any one. You have kindly helped and interested yourself in a poor stranger who turns out to be a nobody, without friends, without romance, and without even mystery. You found me lying in the road down yonder, after a stupid accident that might have happened to any other careless tramp, and which scarcely gave me a claim to a bed in the county hospital, much less under this kindly roof. It was not my fault, as you know, that all this did not come out sooner ; but while it doesn't lessen your generosity, it doesn't lessen my debt, and although I cannot hope to ever repay you, I can at least keep the score from running on. Pardon my speaking so bluntly, but my excuse for speaking at all was to say 'Good-bye' and 'God bless you.' Dr. Duchesne has promised to give me a lift on my way in his buggy when he goes."

There was a slight touch of consciousness in his voice in spite of its sadness, which struck the young girl as a weak and even ungentlemanly note in his otherwise self-abnegating and undemonstrative attitude. If he was a common tramp, he wouldn't talk in that way, and if he wasn't, why did he lie? Her practical good sense here asserted itself.

"But you are far from strong yet ; in fact, the doctor says you might have a relapse at any moment, and you have—that is, you *seem* to have, no money," she said gravely.

"That's true," he said quickly. "I remember I was quite

played out when I entered the settlement, and I think I had parted from even some little trifles I carried with me. I am afraid I was a poor find to those who picked me up, and you ought to have taken warning. But the doctor has offered to lend me enough to take me to San Francisco, if only to give a fair trial to the machine he has set once more a-going."

"Then you have friends in San Francisco?" said the young girl quickly. "Those who know you? Why not write to them first, and tell them you are here?"

"I don't think your postmaster here would be pre-occupied with letters for John Baxter if I did," he said quietly. "But here is the doctor waiting. Good-bye."

He stood looking at her in a peculiar, yet half-resigned way, and held out his hand. For a moment she hesitated. Had he been less independent and strong she would have refused to let him go—have offered him some slight employment at the ranche; for oddly enough, in spite of the suspicion that he was concealing something, she felt that she would have trusted him, and he would have been a help to her. But he was not only determined, but *she* was all the time conscious that he was a totally different man from the one she had taken care of, and merely ordinary prudence demanded that she should know something more of him first. She gave him her hand constrainedly; he pressed it warmly.

Dr. Duchesne drove up, helped him into the buggy, smiled a good-natured but half-perfunctory assurance that he would look after "her patient," and drove away.

The whole thing was over, but so unexpectedly, so suddenly, so unromantically, so unsatisfactorily, that, although her common-sense told her that it was perfectly natural, proper, business-like, and reasonable, and, above all, final and complete, she did not know whether to laugh or be angry.

Yet this was her parting from the man who had but a few days ago moved her to tears with a single hopeless gesture. Well, this would teach her what to expect. Well, what had she expected? Nothing!

Yet for the rest of the day she was unreasonably irritable, and if the conjuncture be not paradoxical, severely practical and inhumanly just. Falling foul of some presumption of Miguel's, based upon his prescriptive rights through long service on the estate, with the recollection of her severity towards his antagonist in her mind, she rated that trusted retainer with such pitiless equity and unfeminine logic that his hot Latin blood chilled in his veins, and he stood livid on the road. Then, informing Dick Shipley with equally relentless calm that she might feel it necessary to change *all* her foremen unless they could agree in harmony, she sought the dignified seclusion of her castle. But her respected parents, whose triumphant relief at the stranger's departure had emboldened them to await her return in the porch with bended bows of invective and lifted javelins of aggression, recoiled before the resistless helm of this cold-browed Minerva, who galloped contemptuously past them.

Nevertheless, she sat late that night at her desk. The cold moon looked down upon her window and lit up the empty porch where her silent guest had mutely watched her. For a moment she regretted that he had recovered his reason, excusing herself on the practical ground that he would never have known his dependence, and he would have been better cared for by her. She felt restless and uneasy. This slight divergence from the practical groove in which her life had been set had disturbed her in many other things, and given her the first views of the narrowness of it.

Suddenly she heard a step in the porch. The lateness of the hour, perhaps some other reason, seemed to startle her,

and she half rose. The next moment the figure of Miguel appeared at the doorway, and with a quick hurried look around him and at the open window he approached her. He was evidently under great excitement. His hollow shaven cheek looked like a waxen effigy in the mission church, his yellow tobacco-stained eye glittered like phosphorescent amber, his lank grey hair was damp and perspiring; but more striking than this was the evident restraint he had put upon himself, pressing his broad-brimmed *sombrero* with both of his trembling yellow hands against his breast. The young girl cast a hurried glance at the open window and at the gun which stood in the corner, and then confronted him with clear and steady eyes, but a paler cheek.

Ah, he began in Spanish, which he himself had taught her as a child. It was a strange thing, his coming there to-night; but then, Mother of God! it was a strange, a terrible thing that she had done to him—old Miguel, her uncle's servant: he that had known her as a *muchacha*; he that had lived all his life at the ranche—ay, and whose fathers before him had lived there all *their* lives and driven the cattle over the very spot where she now stood, before the thieving Americans came here! But he would be calm; yes, the señora should find him calm, even as she was when she told him to go. He would not speak. No, he—Miguel—would contain himself; yes, he *had* mastered himself, but could he restrain others? Ah yes, *others*—that was it. Could he keep Manuel and Pepe and Domínguez from talking to the millman—that leaking sieve, that gabbling brute of a Shipley, for whose sake she had cast off her old servant that very day.

She looked at him with cold astonishment, but without fear. Was he drunk with *aguardiente*, or had his jealousy turned his brain? He continued gasping, but still pressing his hat against his breast,

Ah, he saw it all ! Yes, it was to-day, the day he left. Yes, she had thought it safe to cast Miguel off now—now that *he* was gone.

Without in the least understanding him, the colour had leaped to her cheek, and the consciousness of it made her furious.

“How dare you?” she said passionately. “What has that stranger to do with my affairs or your insolence?”

He stopped and gazed at her with a certain admiring loyalty. “Ah! so,” he said, with a deep breath, “the señora is the niece of her uncle. She does well not to fear *him*—a dog”—with a slight shrug—“who is more than repaid by the señora’s condescension. *He* dare not speak!”

“Who dare not speak? Are you mad?” She stopped with a sudden terrible instinct of apprehension. “Miguel,” she said in her deepest voice, “answer me, I command you! Do you know anything of this man?”

It was Miguel’s turn to recoil from his mistress. “Ah! my God, is it possible the señora has not suspect?”

“Suspect!” said Josephine haughtily, albeit her proud heart was beating quickly. “I *suspect* nothing. I command you to tell me what you *know*.”

Miguel turned with a rapid gesture and closed the door. Then, drawing her away from the window, he said in a hurried whisper—

“I know that that man has not the name of Baxter! I know that he has the name of Randolph, a young gambler, who have won a large sum at Sacramento, and, fearing to be robbed by those he won of, have walk to himself through the road in disguise of a miner. I know that your brother Esteban have decoyed him here, and have fallen on him.”

“Stop!” said the young girl, her eyes, which had been fixed with the agony of conviction, suddenly flashing with

the energy of despair. "And you call yourself the servant of my uncle, and dare say this of his nephew?"

"Yes, señora," broke out the old man passionately. "It is because I am the servant of your uncle that I, and I *alone*, dare say it to you! It is because I perjured my soul, and have perjured my soul to deny it elsewhere, that I now dare to say it! It is because I, your servant, knew it from one of my countrymen who was of the gang—because I, Miguel, knew that your brother was not far away that night, and because I, whom you would dismiss, have picked up this pocket-book of Randolph's and your brother's ring which he have dropped and I have found beneath the body of the man you sent me to fetch."

He drew a packet from his bosom, and tossed it on the desk before her.

"And why have you not told me this before?" said Josephine passionately.

Miguel shrugged his shoulders.

"What good? Possibly this dog Randolph would die. Possibly he would live—as a lunatic. Possibly would happen what has happened. The señora is beautiful. The American has eyes. If the Doña Josephine's beauty shall finish what the silly Don Esteban's arm have begun—what matter?"

"Stop!" cried Josephine, pressing her hands across her shuddering eyelids. Then uncovering her white and set face, she said rapidly, "Saddle my horse and your own at once. Then take your choice! Come with me and repeat all that you have said in the presence of that man, or leave this ranche for ever. For if I live I shall go to him to-night, and tell the whole story."

The old man cast a single glance at his mistress, shrugged his shoulders, and, without a word, left the room. But in ten minutes they were on their way to the county town.

Day was breaking over the distant Burnt Ridge—a faint sombre level, like a funeral pall, in the dim horizon—as they drew up before the gaunt white-painted pile of the hospital building. Josephine uttered a cry ; Dr. Duchesne's buggy was before the door. On its very threshold they met the doctor, dark and irritated. “Then you heard the news?” he said quickly.

Josephine turned her white face to the doctor's. “What news?” she asked, in a voice that seemed strangely deep and resonant.

“The poor fellow had another attack last night, and died of exhaustion about an hour ago. I was too late to save him.”

“Did he say anything? Was he conscious?” asked the girl hoarsely.

“No ; incoherent ! Now I think of it, he harped on the same string as he did the night of the operation. What was it he said? you remember.”

“‘You'll have to kill me first,’” repeated Josephine in a choking voice.

“Yes ; something about his dying before he'd tell. Well, he came back to it before he went off—they often do. You seem a little hoarse with your morning ride. You should take care of that voice of yours. By the way, it's a good deal like your brother's.”

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The Châtelaine of Burnt Ridge never married.

Through the Santa Clara Wheat.

CHAPTER I.

IT was an enormous wheat-field in the Santa Clara valley, stretching to the horizon line unbroken. The meridian sun shone upon it without glint or shadow ; but at times, when a stronger gust of the trade winds passed over it, there was a quick slanting impression of the whole surface that was, however, as unlike a billow as itself was unlike a sea. Even when a lighter zephyr played down its long level the agitation was superficial, and seemed only to momentarily lift a veil of greenish mist that hung above its immovable depths. Occasional puffs of dust alternately rose and fell along an imaginary line across the field, as if a current of air were passing through it, but were otherwise inexplicable.

Suddenly a faint shout, apparently somewhere in the vicinity of the line, brought out a perfectly clear response, followed by the audible murmur of voices which it was impossible to localise. Yet the whole field was so devoid of any suggestion of human life or motion that it seemed rather as if the vast expanse itself had become suddenly articulate and intelligible.

“Wot say?”

“Wheel off.”

“Whar?”

“In the road.”

One of the voices here indicated itself in the direction of

the line of dust, and said, "Comin'," and a man stepped out from the wheat into a broad and dusty avenue.

With his presence three things became apparent.

First, that the puffs of dust indicated the existence of the invisible avenue through the unlimited and unfenced field of grain; secondly, that the stalks of wheat on either side of it were so tall as to actually hide a passing vehicle; and thirdly, that a vehicle had just passed, had lost a wheel, and been dragged partly into the grain by its frightened horse, which a dusty man was trying to restrain and pacify.

The horse, given up to equine hysterics, and evidently convinced that the ordinary buggy behind him had been changed into some dangerous and appalling creation, still plunged and kicked violently to rid himself of it. The man who had stepped out of the depths of the wheat quickly crossed the road, unhitched the traces, drew back the vehicle, and, glancing at the traveller's dusty and disordered clothes, said, with curt sympathy—

"Spilt, too; but not hurt, eh?"

"No, neither of us. I went over with the buggy when the wheel cramped, but *she* jumped clear."

He made a gesture indicating the presence of another. The man turned quickly. There was a second figure, a young girl standing beside the grain from which he had emerged, embracing a few stalks of wheat with one arm and a hand in which she still held her parasol, while she grasped her gathered skirts with the other, and trying to find a secure foothold for her two neat narrow slippers on a crumbling cake of adobe above the fathomless dust of the roadway. Her face, although annoyed and discontented, was pretty, and her light dress and slim figure were suggestive of a certain superior condition.

The man's manner at once softened with Western courtesy. He swung his broad-brimmed hat from his head, and bent

his body with the ceremoniousness of the country ball-room. "I reckon the lady had better come up to the shanty out o' the dust and sun till we kin help you get these things fixed," he said to the driver. "I'll send round by the road for your hoss, and have one of mine fetch up your waggon."

"Is it far?" asked the girl, slightly acknowledging his salutation, without waiting for her companion to reply.

"Only a step this way," he answered, motioning to the field of wheat beside her.

"What! In *there*? I never could go in there," she said decidedly.

"It's a heap shorter than by the road, and not so dusty. I'll go with you and pilot you."

The young girl cast a vexed look at her companion as the probable cause of all this trouble, and shook her head. But at the same moment one little foot slipped from the adobe into the dust again. She instantly clambered back with a little feminine shriek, and ejaculated, "Well, of all things!" and then, fixing her blue annoyed eyes on the stranger, asked impatiently, "Why couldn't I go there by the road in the waggon? I could manage to hold on and keep in."

"Because I reckon you'd find it too pow'ful hot waitin' here till we got round to ye."

There was no doubt it was very hot, the radiation from the baking roadway beating up under her parasol and pricking her cheek-bones and eyeballs like needles. She gave a fastidious little shudder, furled her parasol, gathered her skirts still tighter, faced about, and said, "Go on, then." The man slipped backwards into the ranks of stalks, parting them with one hand and holding out the other as if to lead her. But she evaded the invitation by holding her tightly-drawn skirt with both hands and bending her head forward as if she had not noticed it. The next moment the road, and even the whole outer world disappeared behind them,

and they seemed floating in a choking green translucent mist.

But the effect was only momentary: a few steps farther she found that she could walk with little difficulty between the ranks of stalks, which were regularly spaced, and the resemblance now changed to that of a long pillared conservatory of greenish glass, that touched all objects with its pervading hue. She also found that the close air above her head was continually freshened by the interchange of currents of lower temperature from below—as if the whole vast field had a circulation of its own—and that the adobe beneath her feet was gratefully cool to her tread. There was no dust, as he had said; what had at first half suffocated her seemed to be some stimulating aroma of creation that filled the narrow green aisles, and now imparted a strange vigour and excitement to her as she walked along. Meantime her guide was not conversationally idle. Now, no doubt, she had never seen anything like this before? It was ordinary wheat, only it was grown on adobe soil—the richest in the valley. These stalks, she could see herself, were ten and twelve feet high. That was the trouble, they all ran too much to stalk, although the grain yield was “suthen’ pow’ful.” She could tell that to her friends, for he reckoned she was the only young lady that had ever walked under such a growth. Perhaps she was new to Californy? He thought so from the start. Well, this was Californy, and this was not the least of the ways it could “lay over” every other country on God’s yearth. Many folks thought it was the gold and the climate, but she could see for herself what it could do with wheat. He wondered if her brother had ever told her of it? No, the stranger wasn’t her brother. Nor cousin, nor company? No; only the hired driver from a San José hotel, who was takin’ her over to Major Randolph’s. Yes, he knew the old Major; the ranche was a

pretty place, nigh unto three miles farther on. Now that he knew the driver was no relation of hers he didn't mind telling her that the buggy was a "rather old consarn," and the driver didn't know his business. Yes, it might be fixed up so as to take her over to the Major's; there was one of their own men—a young fellow—who could do anything that *could* be done with wood and iron—a reg'lar genius!—and *he'd* tackle it. It might take an hour, but she'd find it quite cool waiting in the shanty. It was a rough place, for they only camped out there during the season to look after the crop, and lived at their own homes the rest of the time. Was she going to stay long at the Major's? He noticed she had not brought her trunk with her. Had she known the Major's wife long? Perhaps she thought of settling in the neighbourhood?

All this naïve, good-humoured questioning—so often cruelly misunderstood as mere vulgar curiosity, but as often the courteous instinct of simple unaffected people to entertain the stranger by inviting him to talk of what concerns himself rather than their own selves—was nevertheless, I fear, met only by monosyllables from the young lady or an impatient question in return. She scarcely raised her eyes to the broad jean-shirted back that preceded her through the grain until the man abruptly ceased talking, and his manner, without losing its half-paternal courtesy, became graver. She was beginning to be conscious of her incivility, and was trying to think of something to say, when he exclaimed, with a slight air of relief, "Here we are!" and the shanty suddenly appeared before them.

It certainly was very rough—a mere shell of unpainted boards that scarcely rose above the level of the surrounding grain, and a few yards distant was invisible. Its slightly sloping roof, already warped and shrunk into long fissures that permitted glimpses of the steel-blue sky above, was

evidently intended only as a shelter from the cloudless sun in those two months of rainless days and dewless nights when it was inhabited. Through the open doors and windows she could see a row of "bunks" or rude sleeping berths against the walls, furnished with coarse mattresses and blankets. As the young girl halted, the man with an instinct of delicacy hurried forward, entered the shanty, and dragging a rude bench to the doorway, placed it so that she could sit beneath the shade of the roof yet with her back to these domestic revelations. Two or three men, who had been apparently lounging there, rose quietly and unobtrusively withdrew. Her guide brought her a tin cup of deliciously cool water, exchanged a few hurried words with his companions, and then disappeared with them, leaving her alone.

Her first sense of relief from their company was, I fear, stronger than any other feeling. After a hurried glance around the deserted apartment she arose, shook out her dress and mantle, and then going into the darkest corner supported herself with one hand against the wall while with the other she drew off, one by one, her slippers from her slim, striped-stockinged feet, shook and blew out the dust that had penetrated within, and put them on again. Then, perceiving a triangular fragment of looking-glass nailed against the wall, she settled the strings of her bonnet by the aid of its reflection, patted the fringe of brown hair on her forehead with her separated five fingers as if playing an imaginary tune on her brow, and came back with maidenly abstraction to the doorway.

Everything was quiet, and her seclusion seemed unbroken. A smile played for an instant in the soft shadows of her eyes and mouth as she recalled the abrupt withdrawal of the men. Then her mouth straightened and her brows slightly bent. It was certainly very unmannerly in them to go off in that way. "Good heavens! couldn't they have stayed around

without talking? Surely it didn't require four men to go and bring up that waggon?" She picked up her parasol from the bench with an impatient little jerk. Then she held out her ungloved hand into the hot sunshine beyond the door with the gesture she would have used had it been raining, and withdrew it as quickly—her hand quite scorched in the burning rays. Nevertheless, after another impatient pause she desperately put up her parasol and stepped from the shanty.

Presently she was conscious of a faint sound of hammering not far away. Perhaps there was another shed, but hidden like everything else in this monotonous ridiculous grain. Some stalks, however, were trodden down and broken around the shanty; she could move more easily and see where she was going. To her delight, a few steps farther brought her into a current of the trade-wind and a cooler atmosphere. And a short distance beyond them, certainly, was the shed from which the hammering proceeded. She approached it boldly.

It was simply a roof upheld by rude uprights and cross-beams, and open to the breeze that swept through it. At one end was a small blacksmith's forge, some machinery, and what appeared to be part of a small steam-engine. Midway of the shed was a closet or cupboard fastened with a large padlock. Occupying its whole length on the other side was a work-bench, and at the farther end stood the workman she had heard.

He was apparently only a year or two older than herself, and clad in blue jean overalls, blackened and smeared with oil and coal-dust. Even his youthful face, which he turned towards her, had a black smudge running across it and almost obliterating a small auburn moustache. The look of surprise that he gave her, however, quickly passed; he remained patiently and in a half-preoccupied way, holding his

hammer in his hand as she advanced. This was evidently the young fellow who could "do anything that could be done with wood and iron."

She was very sorry to disturb him, but could he tell her how long it would be before the waggon could be brought up and mended? He could not say that until he himself saw what was to be done; if it was only a matter of the wheel he could fix it up in a few moments; if, as he had been told, it was a case of twisted or bent axle it would take longer, but it would be here very soon. Ah, then, would he let her wait here, as she was very anxious to know at once, and it was much cooler than in the other shed? Certainly; he would go over and bring her a bench. But here she begged he wouldn't trouble himself; she could sit anywhere comfortably.

The lower end of the work-bench was covered with clean and odorous shavings; she lightly brushed them aside and, with a youthful movement, swung herself to a seat upon it, supporting herself on one hand as she leaned towards him. She could thus see that his eyes were of a light yellowish-brown, like clarified honey, with a singular look of clear concentration in them, which, however, was the same whether turned upon his work, the surrounding grain, or upon her. This, and his sublime unconsciousness of the smudge across his face and his blackened hands, made her wonder if the man who could do everything with wood and iron was above doing anything with water. She had half a mind to tell him of it, particularly as she noticed also that his throat below the line of sunburn disclosed by his open collar was quite white, and his grimy hands well-made. She was wondering whether he would be affronted if she said in her politest way, "I beg your pardon, but do you know you have quite accidentally got something on your face," and offer her handkerchief, which, of course, he would decline, when her eye fell on the steam-engine.

"How odd! Do you use that on the farm?"

"No"—he smiled here, the smudge accenting it and setting off his white teeth in a Christy Minstrel fashion that exasperated her—no, although it *could* be used, and had been. But it was his first effort, made two years ago, when he was younger and more inexperienced. It was a rather rough thing, she could see—but he had to make it at odd times with what iron he could pick up or pay for, and at different forges where he worked.

She begged his pardon—where—

Where he worked.

Ah, then he was the machinist or engineer here?

No, he worked here just like the others, only he was allowed to put up a forge while the grain was green, and have his bench in consideration of the odd jobs he could do in the way of mending tools, &c. There was a heap of mending and welding to do—she had no idea how quickly agricultural machines got out of order! He had done much of his work on the steam-engine on moonlit nights. Yes; she had no idea how perfectly clear and light it was here in the valley on such nights; although of course the shadows were very dark, and when he dropped a screw or a nut it was difficult to find. He had worked there because it saved time and because it didn't cost anything, and he had nobody to look on or interfere with him. No, it was not lonely; the coyotes and wild cats sometimes came very near, but were always more surprised and frightened than he was; and once a horseman who had strayed off the distant road yonder mistook him for an animal and shot at him twice.

He told all this with such freedom from embarrassment, and with such apparent unconsciousness of the blue eyes that were following him, and the light, graceful figure—which was so near his own that in some of his gestures his grimy hands almost touched its delicate garments—that, accus-

tomed as she was to a certain masculine aberration in her presence, she was greatly amused by his naïve acceptance of her as an equal. Suddenly, looking frankly in her face, he said—

“I’ll show you a secret, if you care to see it.”

Nothing would please her more.

He glanced hurriedly around, took a key from his pocket, and unlocked the padlock that secured the closet she had noticed. Then, reaching within, with infinite care he brought out a small mechanical model.

“There’s an invention of my own. A reaper and thresher combined. I’m going to have it patented and have a big one made from this model. This will work, as you see.”

He then explained to her with great precision how as it moved over the field the double operation was performed by the same motive-power. That it would be a saving of a certain amount of labour and time which she could not remember. She did not understand a word of his explanations; she saw only a clean and pretty but complicated toy, that under the manipulation of his grimy fingers rattled a number of frail-like staves and worked a number of wheels and drums, yet there was no indication of her ignorance in her sparkling eyes and smiling, breathless attitude. Perhaps she was interested in his own absorption; the revelation of his pre-occupation with this model struck her as if he had made her a *confidante* of some boyish passion for one of her own sex, and she regarded him with the same sympathising superiority.

“You will make a fortune out of it,” she said pleasantly.

Well, he might make enough to be able to go on with some other inventions he had in his mind. They cost money and time, no matter how careful one was.

This was another interesting revelation to the young girl. He not only did not seem to care for the profit his devotion

brought him, but even his one beloved ideal might be displaced by another. So like a man after all!

Her reflections were broken upon by the sound of voices. The young man carefully replaced the model in its closet with a parting glance as if he was closing a shrine, and said, "There comes the waggon." The young girl turned to face the men who were dragging it from the road, with the half-complacent air of having been victorious over their late rude abandonment, but they did not seem to notice it or to be surprised at her companion, who quickly stepped forward and examined the broken vehicle with workmanlike deliberation.

"I hope you will be able to do something with it," she said sweetly, appealing directly to him. "I should thank you *so much*."

He did not reply. Presently he looked up to the man who had brought her to the shanty, and said, "The axle's strained, but it's safe for five or six miles more of this road. I'll put the wheel on easily." He paused, and without glancing at her continued, "You might send her on by the cart."

"Pray don't trouble yourselves," interrupted the young girl, with a pink uprising in her cheeks; "I shall be quite satisfied with the buggy as it stands." Send her on in the cart; indeed! Really they were a rude set—*all* of them.

Without taking the slightest notice of her remark, the man replied gravely to the young mechanic, "Yes, but we'll be wanting the cart before it can get back from taking her."

"Her" again. "I assure you the buggy will serve perfectly well—if this—gentleman—will only be kind enough to put on the wheel again," she returned hotly.

The young mechanic at once set to work. The young girl walked apart silently until the wheel was restored to its axle. But to her surprise a different horse was led forward to be harnessed.

"We thought your horse wasn't safe in case of another accident," said the first man, with the same smileless consideration. "This one wouldn't cut up if he was harnessed to an earthquake or a worse driver than you've got."

It occurred to her instantly that the more obvious remedy of sending another driver had been already discussed and rejected by them. Yet, when her own driver appeared a moment afterwards, she ascended to her seat with some dignity and a slight increase of colour.

"I am very much obliged to you all," she said, without glancing at the young inventor.

"Don't mention it, miss."

"Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon." They all took off their hats with the same formal gravity as the horse moved forward, but turned back to their work again before she was out of the field.

CHAPTER II.

THE ranche of Major Randolph lay on a rich *falda* of the Coast Range, and overlooked the great wheat plains that the young girl had just left. The house of wood and adobe, buried to its first storey in rose-trees and passion vines, was large and commodious. Yet it contained only the Major, his wife, her son and daughter, and the few occasional visitors from San Francisco whom he entertained and she tolerated.

For the Major's household was not entirely harmonious. While a young infantry subaltern at a Gulf station, he had been attracted by the piquant foreign accent and dramatic gestures of a French Creole widow, and—believing them, in the first flush of his youthful passion, more than an offset to the encumbrance of her two children who, with the memory

of various marital infidelities, were all her late husband had left her—had proposed, been accepted, and promptly married to her. Before he obtained his captaincy she had partly lost her accent, and those dramatic gestures, which had accented the passion of their brief courtship, began to intensify domestic altercation and the bursts of idle jealousy to which she was subject. Whether she was revenging herself on her second husband for the faults of her first is not known, but it was certain that she brought an unhallowed knowledge of the weaknesses, cheap cynicism, and vanity of a foreign predecessor to sit in judgment upon the simple-minded and chivalrous American soldier who had succeeded him, and who was, in fact, the most loyal of husbands. The natural result of her scepticism was an espionage and criticism of the wives of the Major's brother officers that compelled a frequent change of quarters. When to this was finally added a racial divergence and antipathy, the public disparagement of the customs and education of her female colleagues, and the sudden insistence of a foreign and French dominance in her household beyond any ordinary Creole justification, Randolph, presumably to avoid later international complications, resigned while he was as yet a major. Luckily his latest banishment to an extreme Western outpost had placed him in California during the flood of a speculation epoch. He purchased a valuable Spanish grant to three leagues of land for little over a three months' pay. Following that yearning which compels retired ship-captains and rovers of all degrees to buy a farm in their old days, the Major, professionally and socially inured to border strife, sought surcease and Arcadian repose in ranching.

It was here that Mrs. Randolph, late relict of the late Scipion l'Hommadiou, devoted herself to bringing up her children after the extremest of French methods, and in resurrecting a "de" from her own family to give a distinct and

aristocratic character to their name. The "de Fontanges l'Hommadieu" were, however, only known to their neighbours—after the Western fashion—by their stepfather's name, when they were known at all, which was seldom. For the boy was unpleasantly conceited as a precocious worldling, and the girl as unpleasantly complacent in her rôle of *ingénue*. The household was completely dominated by Mrs. Randolph. A punctilious Catholic, she attended all the functions of the adjacent Mission, and the shadow of a black *soutane* at twilight gliding through the wild oat-fields behind the ranche had often been mistaken for a coyote. The peace-loving Major did not object to a piety which, while it left his own conscience free, imparted a respectable religious air to his household, and kept him from the equally distasteful approaches of the Puritanism of his neighbours, and was blissfully unconscious that he was strengthening the antagonistic foreign element in his family with an alien Church.

Meantime, as the repaired buggy was slowly making its way towards his house, Major Randolph entered his wife's boudoir with a letter which the San Francisco post had just brought him. A look of embarrassment on his good-humoured face strengthened the hard lines of hers; she felt some momentary weakness of her natural enemy, and prepared to give battle.

"I'm afraid here's something of a muddle, Josephine," he began, with a deprecating smile. "Mallory, who was coming down here with his daughter, you know——"

"This is the first intimation *I* have had that anything has been settled upon," interrupted the lady, with appalling deliberation.

"However, my dear, you know I told you last week that he thought of bringing her here while he went South on business. You know, being a widower, he has no one to leave her with."

"And I suppose it is the American fashion to entrust one's daughters to any old boon companions?"

"Mallory is an old friend," interrupted the Major impatiently. "He knows I'm married, and although he has never seen *you*, he is quite willing to leave his daughter here."

"Thank you!"

"Come, you know what I mean. The man naturally believes that my wife will be a proper chaperon for his daughter. But that is not the present question. He intended to call here; I expected to take you over to San José to see her and all that, you know; but the fact of it is—that is—it seems from this letter that—he's been called away sooner than he expected, and that—well—hang it! the girl is actually on her way here now."

"Alone?"

"I suppose so. You know one thinks nothing of that here."

"Or any other propriety, for that matter."

"For heaven's sake, Josephine, don't be ridiculous! Of course it's stupid her coming in this way, and Mallory ought to have brought her—but she's coming, and we must receive her. By Jove! Here she is now!" he added, starting up after a hurried glance through the window. "But what kind of a d——d turn-out is that, anyhow?"

It certainly was an odd-looking conveyance that had entered the gates, and was now slowly coming up the drive towards the house. A large draught horse harnessed to a dust-covered buggy, whose strained fore-axle, bent by the last mile of heavy road, had slanted the tops of the fore-wheels towards each other at an alarming angle. The light, graceful dress and elegant parasol of the young girl, who occupied half of its single seat, looked ludicrously pronounced by the side of the slouching figure and grimy duster of the driver, who occupied the other half.

Mrs. Randolph gave a gritty laugh. "I thought you said she was alone. Is that an escort she has picked up, American fashion, on the road?"

"That's her hired driver, no doubt. Hang it! she can't drive here by herself," retorted the Major impatiently, hurrying to the door and down the staircase. But he was instantly followed by his wife. She had no idea of permitting a possible understanding to be exchanged in their first greeting. The late M. l'Hommadiou had been able to impart a whole plan of intrigue in a single word and glance.

Happily, Rose Mallory, already in the hall, in a few words detailed the accident that had befallen her, to the honest sympathy of the Major and the coldly polite concern of Mrs. Randolph, who in deliberately chosen sentences managed to convey to the young girl the conviction that accidents of any kind to young ladies were to be regarded as only a shade removed from indiscretions. Rose was impressed, and even flattered, by the fastidiousness of this foreign-appearing woman, and after the fashion of youthful natures, accorded to her the respect due to recognised authority. When to this authority, which was evident, she added a depreciation of the Major, I fear that some common instinct of feminine tyranny responded in Rose's breast, and that on the very threshold of the honest soldier's home she tacitly agreed with the wife to look down upon him. Mrs. Randolph departed to inform her son and daughter of their guest's arrival. As a matter of fact, however, they had already observed her approach to the house through the slits of their drawn window-blinds, and those even narrower prejudices and limited comprehensions which their education had fostered. The girl, Adele, had only grasped the fact that Rose had come to their house in fine clothes, alone with a man, in a broken-down vehicle, and was moved to easy mirth and righteous wonder. The young man, Emile,

had agreed with her, with the mental reservation that the guest was pretty, and must eventually fall in love with him. They both, however, welcomed her with a trained politeness and a superficial attention that, while the indifference of her own countrymen in the wheat-field was still fresh in her recollection, struck her with grateful contrast; the Major's quiet and unobtrusive kindliness naturally made less impression, or was accepted as a matter of course.

"Well," said the Major, cheerfully but tentatively, to his wife when they were alone again, "she seems a nice girl after all; and a good deal of pluck and character, by Jove! to push on in that broken buggy rather than linger or come in a farm cart, eh?"

"She was alone in that wheat-field," said Mrs. Randolph, with grim deliberation, "for half an hour, she confesses it herself—*talking with a young man!*"

"Yes, but the others had gone for the buggy. And, in the name of Heaven, what would you have her do—hide herself in the grain?" said the Major desperately. "Besides," he added, with a recklessness he afterwards regretted, "that mechanical chap they've got there is really intelligent and worth talking to."

"I have no doubt *she* thought so," said Mrs. Randolph, with a mirthless smile. "In fact, I have observed that the American freedom generally means doing what you *want* to do. Indeed, I wonder she didn't bring him with her! Only I beg, Major, that you will not again, in the presence of my daughter—and, I may even say, of my son—talk lightly of the solitary meetings of young ladies with mechanics, even though their faces were smutty and their clothes covered with oil."

The Major here muttered something about there being less danger in a young lady listening to the intelligence of a coarsely-dressed labourer than to the compliments of a

rose-scented fop, but Mrs. Randolph walked out of the room before he finished the evident platitude.

That night Rose Mallory retired to her room in a state of self-satisfaction that she even felt was to a certain extent a virtue. She was delighted with her reception, and with her hostess and family. It was strange her father had not spoken more of *Mrs.* Randolph, who was clearly the superior of his old friend. What fine manners they all had, so different from other people she had known! There was quite an old-world civilisation about them; really it was like going abroad! She would make the most of her opportunity, and profit by her visit. She would begin by improving her French; they spoke it perfectly, and with such a pure accent. She would correct certain errors she was conscious of in her own manners, and copy Mrs. Randolph as much as possible. Certainly there was a great deal to be said of Mrs. Randolph's way of looking at things. Now she thought of it calmly, there *was* too much informality and freedom in American ways! There was not enough respect due to position and circumstances. Take those men in the wheat-field, for example. Yet here she found it difficult to formulate an indictment against them for "freedom." She would like to go there some day with the Randolphs and let them see what company manners were! She was thoroughly convinced now that her father had done wrong in sending her alone; it certainly was most disrespectful to them and careless of him (she had quite forgotten that she had herself proposed to her father to go alone rather than wait at the hotel), and she must have looked very ridiculous in her fine clothes and the broken-down buggy. When her trunk came by express to-morrow she would look out something more sober. She must remember that she was in a Catholic and religious household now. Ah yes! how very fine it was to see that priest at

dinner in his *soutane*, sitting down like one of the family, and making them all seem like a picture of some historical and aristocratic romance ! And then they were actually “de Fontanges l’Hommadieu.” How different he was from that shabby Methodist minister who used to come to see her father in a black cravat with a hideous bow ! Really there was something to say for a religion that contained so much picturesque refinement ; and for her part—— But that will do. I beg to say that I am not writing of any particular snob nor feminine monstrosity, but of a very charming creature, who was quite able to say her prayers afterwards like a good girl, and lay her pretty cheek upon her pillow without a blush.

She opened her window and looked out. The moon, a great silver dome, was uplifting itself from a bluish-grey level, which she knew was the distant plain of wheat. Somewhere in its midst appeared a dull star, at times brightening as if blown upon or drawn upwards in a comet-like trail. By some odd instinct she felt that it was the solitary forge of the young inventor, and pictured him standing before it with his abstracted hazel eyes and a face more begrimed in the moonlight than ever. When *did* he wash himself ? Perhaps not until Sunday. How lonely it must be out there ! She slightly shivered and turned from the window. As she did so, it seemed to her that something knocked against her door from without. Opening it quickly, she was almost certain that the sound of a rustling skirt retreated along the passage. It was very late ; perhaps she had disturbed the house by shutting her window. No doubt it was the motherly interest of Mrs. Randolph that impelled her to softly come and look after her ; and for once her simple surmises were correct. For not only the inspecting eyes of her hostess, but the amatory glances of the youthful Emile, had been fastened upon her window until the light

disappeared, and even the Holy Mission Church of San José had assured itself of the dear child's safety with a large and supple ear at her keyhole.

The next morning Major Randolph took her with Adele in a light carriage over the rancho. Although his domain was nearly as large as the adjoining wheat-plain, it was not, like that, monopolised by one enormous characteristic yield, but embraced a more diversified product. There were acres and acres of potatoes in rows of endless and varying succession; there were miles of wild oats and barley, which overtopped them as they drove in narrow lanes of dry and dusty monotony; there were orchards of pears, apricots, peaches, and nectarines, and vineyards of grapes, so comparatively dwarfed in height that they scarcely reached to the level of their eyes, yet laden and breaking beneath the weight of their ludicrously disproportionate fruit. What seemed to be a vast green plateau covered with tiny patches, that bounded the northern edge of the prospect, was an enormous bed of strawberry plants. But everywhere, crossing the track, bounding the fields, orchards, and vineyards, intersecting the paths of the whole domain, were narrow irrigating ducts and channels of running water.

"Those," said the Major poetically, "are the veins and arteries of the rancho. Come with me now, and I'll show you its pulsating heart." Descending from the waggon into pedestrian prose again, he led Rose a hundred yards farther to a shed that covered a wonderful artesian well. In the centre of a basin a column of water rose regularly with the even flow and volume of a brook. "It is one of the largest in the State," said the Major, "and is the life of all that grows here during six months of the year."

Pleased as the young girl was with those evidences of the prosperity and position of her host, she was struck, however, with the fact that the farm-labourers, vine-growers, nursery-

men, and all field hands scattered on the vast estate were apparently of the same independent, unpastoral, and unprofessional character as the men of the wheat-field. There were no cottages or farm buildings that she could see, nor any apparent connection between the household and the estate; far from suggesting tenantry or retainers, the men who were working in the fields glanced at them as they passed with the indifference of strangers, or replied to the Major's greetings or questionings with perfect equality of manner, or even business-like reserve and caution. Her host explained that the ranche was worked by a company "on shares," that those labourers were, in fact, the bulk of the company, and that he, the Major, only furnished the land, the seed, and the implements. "That man who was driving the long roller, and with whom you were indignant because he wouldn't get out of our way, is the president of the company."

"That needn't make him so uncivil," said Rose poutingly, "for if it comes to that, you're the *landlord*," she added triumphantly.

"No," said the Major good-humouredly. "I am simply the man driving the lighter and more easily-managed team for pleasure, and he's the man driving the heavier and more difficult machine for work. It's for me to get out of his way; and looked at in the light of my being *the landlord*, it is still worse, for as we're working 'on shares' I'm interrupting *his* work and reducing *his* profits merely because I choose to sacrifice my own."

I need not say that those atrociously levelling sentiments were received by the young ladies with that feminine scorn which is only qualified by misconception. Rose, who, under the influence of her hostess, had a vague impression that they sounded something like the French Revolution, and that Adele must feel like the Princess Elizabeth, rushed to

her relief like a good girl. "But, Major, now, *you're* a gentleman, and if *you* had been driving that roller you know you would have turned out for us."

"I don't know about that," said the Major mischievously; "but if I had, I should have known that the other fellow who accepted it wasn't a gentleman."

But Rose, having sufficiently shown her partisanship in the discussion, after the feminine fashion, did not care particularly for the logical result. After a moment's silence she resumed. "And the wheat ranche below—is that carried on in the same way?"

"Yes. But their landlord is a bank, who advances not only the land but the money to work it, and doesn't ride around in a buggy with a couple of charmingly distracting young ladies."

"And do they all share alike?" continued Rose, ignoring the pleasantry, "big and little—that young inventor with the rest?"

She stopped. She felt the *ingénue's* usually complacent eyes suddenly fixed upon her with an unhallowed precocity, and as quickly withdrawn. Without knowing why, she felt embarrassed, and changed the subject.

The next day they drove to the Convent of Santa Clara and the Mission College of San José. Their welcome at both places seemed to Rose to be a mingling of caste greeting and spiritual zeal, and the austere seclusion and reserve of those cloisters repeated that suggestion of an old-world civilisation that had already fascinated the young Western girl. They made other excursions in the vicinity, but did not extend it to a visit to their few neighbours. With their reserved and exclusive ideas this fact did not strike Rose as peculiar, but on a later shopping expedition to the town of San José, a certain reticence and aggressive sensitiveness on the part of the shopkeepers and tradespeople towards the

Randolphs produced an unpleasant impression on her mind. She could not help noticing, too, that after the first stare of astonishment which greeted her appearance with her hostess, she herself was included in the antagonism. With her youthful prepossession for her friends, this distinction she regarded as flattering and aristocratic, and I fear she accentuated it still more by discussing with Mrs. Randolph the merits of the shopkeepers' wares in schoolgirl French before them. She was unfortunate enough, however, to do this in the shop of a polyglot German.

"Oxcoos me, mees," he said gravely, "but dot lady speaks Engeleesh so goot mit yourselluf, and ven you dells to her dot silk is hallf gotton in English, she onderstand you mooch better and it don't make nodings to me." The laugh which would have followed from her own countrywoman did not, however, break upon the trained faces of the "de Fontanges l'Hommadieus," yet while Rose would have joined in it, albeit a little ruefully, she felt for the first time mortified at their civil insincerity.

At the end of two weeks Major Randolph received a letter from Mr. Mallory. When he had read it, he turned to his wife: "He thanks you," he said, "for your kindness to his daughter, and explains that his sudden departure was owing to the necessity of his taking advantage of a great opportunity for speculation that had offered." As Mrs. Randolph turned away with a slight shrug of the shoulders, the Major continued: "But you haven't heard all! That opportunity was the securing of a half interest in a Cinnabar lode in Sonora, which has already gone up a hundred thousand dollars in his hands! By Jove! a man can afford to drop a little social ceremony on those terms—eh, Josephine?" he concluded, with a triumphant chuckle.

"He's as likely to lose his hundred thousand tomorrow, while his manners will remain," said Mrs.

Randolph. "I've no faith in these sudden California fortunes."

"You're wrong as regards Mallory, for he's as careful as he is lucky. He don't throw money away for appearance's sake, or he'd have a rich home for that daughter. He could afford it."

Mrs. Randolph was silent. "She is his only daughter, I believe?" she continued presently.

"Yes—he has no other kith or kin," returned the Major.

"She seems to be very much impressed by Emile," said Mrs. Randolph.

Major Randolph faced his wife quickly. "In the name of all that's ridiculous, my dear, you are not already thinking of——" he gasped.

"I should be very loth to give *my* sanction to anything of the kind, knowing the difference of her birth, education, and religion—although the latter I believe she would readily change," said Mrs. Randolph severely. "But when you speak of *my* already thinking of 'such things,' do you suppose that your friend, Mr. Mallory, didn't consider all that when he sent that girl here?"

"Never," said the Major vehemently; "and if it entered his head now, by Jove, he'd take her away to-morrow—always supposing I didn't anticipate him by sending her off myself."

Mrs. Randolph uttered her mirthless laugh. "And you suppose the girl would go? Really, Major, you don't seem to understand this boasted liberty of your own country-woman. What does she care for her father's control? Why, she'd make him do just what *she* wanted. But," she added, with an expression of dignity, "perhaps we had better not discuss this until we know something of Emile's feelings in the matter. That is the only question that concerns us." With this she swept out of the room, leaving the Major at first speechless with honest indignation, and then, after the

fashion of all guileless natures, a little uneasy and suspicious of his own guilelessness. For a day or two after he found himself, not without a sensation of meanness, watching Rose when in Emile's presence, but he could distinguish nothing more than the frank satisfaction she showed equally to the others. Yet he found himself regretting even that, so subtle was the contagion of his wife's suspicions.

CHAPTER III.

It had been a warm morning ; an unusual mist, which the sun had not dissipated, had crept on from the great grain-fields beyond, and hung around the house charged with a dry, dusty closeness that seemed to be quite independent of the sun's rays, and more like a heated exhalation or emanation of the soil itself. In its acrid irritation Rose thought she could detect the breath of the wheat as on the day she had plunged into its pale green shadows. By the afternoon this mist had disappeared, apparently in the same mysterious manner, but not scattered by the usual trade wind, which—another unusual circumstance—that day was not forthcoming. There was a breathlessness in the air like the hush of listening expectancy, which filled the young girl with a vague restlessness, and seemed to even affect a scattered company of crows in the field beyond the house, who rose suddenly with startled but aimless wings, and then dropped vacantly among the grain again.

Major Randolph was inspecting a distant part of the ranche, Mrs. Randolph was presumably engaged in her boudoir, and Rose was sitting between Adele and Emile before the piano in the drawing-room, listlessly turning over the leaves of some music. There had been an odd mingling of eagerness and abstraction in the usual attentions of the

young man that morning, and a certain nervous affectation in his manner of twisting the ends of a small black moustache, which resembled his mother's eyebrows, that had affected Rose with a half-amused, half-uneasy consciousness, but which she had, however, referred to the restlessness produced by the weather. It occurred to her also that the vacuously amiable Adele had once or twice regarded her with the same precocious childlike curiosity and infantine cunning she had once before exhibited. All this did not, however, abate her admiration for both—perhaps particularly for this picturesquely gentlemanly young fellow, with his gentle audacities of compliment, his caressing attentions, and his unfailing and equal address. And when, discovering that she had mislaid her fan for the fifth time that morning, he started up with equal and undiminished fire to go again and fetch it, the look of grateful pleasure and pleading perplexity in her pretty eyes might have turned a less conceited brain than his.

“But you don't know where it is?”

“I shall find it by instinct.”

“You are spoiling me—you two.” The parenthesis was a hesitating addition, but she continued, with fresh sincerity, “I shall be quite helpless when I leave here—if I am ever able to go by myself.”

“Don't ever go, then.”

“But just now I want my fan; it is so close everywhere to-day.”

“I fly, mademoiselle.”

He started to the door.

She called after him.

“Let me help your instinct, then; I had it last in the Major's study.”

“That was where I was going.”

He disappeared. Rose got up and moved uneasily to-

wards the window. "How queer and quiet it looks outside. It's really too bad that he should be sent after that fan again. He'll never find it." She resumed her place at the piano, Adele following her with round, expectant eyes. After a pause she started up again. "I'll go and fetch it myself," she said, with a half-embarrassed laugh, and ran to the door.

Scarcely understanding her own nervousness, but finding relief in rapid movement, Rose flew lightly up the staircase. The Major's study, where she had been writing letters during his absence that morning, was at the farther end of a long passage, and near her own bedroom, the door of which, as she passed, she noticed, half-absorbedly, was open, but she continued on and hurriedly entered the study. At the same moment Emile, with a smile on his face, turned towards her with the fan in his hand.

"Oh, you've found it," she said, with nervous eagerness. "I was so afraid you'd have all your trouble for nothing."

She extended her hand, with a half-breathless smile, for the fan, but he caught her outstretched little palm in his own, and held it.

"Ah! but you are not going to leave us, are you?"

In a flash of consciousness she understood him, and as it seemed to her, her own nervousness, and all, and everything. And with it came a swift appreciation of all it meant to her and her future. To be always with him and like him, a part of this refined and restful seclusion—akin to all that had so attracted her in this house; not to be obliged to educate herself up to it, but to be in it on equal terms at once; to know that it was no wild, foolish, youthful fancy, but a wise, thoughtful, and prudent resolve, that her father would understand and her friends respect: these were the thoughts that crowded quickly upon her, more like an explanation of her feelings than a revelation, in the brief second that he held her hand. It was not, perhaps, love as

she had dreamed it, and even *believed* it, before. She was not ashamed or embarrassed; she even felt, with a slight pride, that she was not blushing. She raised her eyes frankly. What she *would* have said she did not know, for the door, which he had closed behind her, began to shake violently.

It was not the fear of some angry intrusion or interference surely that made him drop her hand instantly. It was not—her second thought—the idea that some one had fallen in a fit against it that blanched his face with abject and unreasoning terror! It must have been something else that caused him to utter an inarticulate cry and dash out of the room and down the stairs like a madman? What had happened?

In her own self-possession she knew that all this was passing rapidly, that it was not the door now that was still shaking, for it had swung almost shut again—but it was the windows, the book-shelves, the floor beneath her feet, that were all shaking. She heard a hurried scrambling, the trampling of feet below, and the quick rustling of a skirt in the passage, as if some one had precipitately fled from her room. Yet no one had called to her—even *he* had said nothing—whatever had happened they clearly had not cared for her to know.

The jarring and rattling ceased as suddenly, but the house seemed silent and empty. She moved to the door, which had now swung open a few inches, but to her astonishment it was fixed in that position, and she could not pass. As yet she had been free from any personal fear, and even now it was with a half smile at her imprisonment in the Major's study that she rang the bell and turned to the window. A man, whom she recognised as one of the ranche labourers, was standing a hundred feet away in the garden, looking curiously at the house. He saw her face as she tried to raise the sash, uttered an exclamation, and ran forward. But before she could understand what he

said, the sash began to rattle in her hand, the jarring recommenced, the floor shook beneath her feet, a hideous sound of grinding seemed to come from the walls, a thin seam of dust-like smoke broke from the ceiling, and with the noise of falling plaster a dozen books followed each other from the shelves, in what, in the frantic hurry of that moment, seemed a grimly deliberate succession; a picture hanging against the wall, to her dazed wonder, swung forward, and appeared to stand at right angles from it; she felt herself reeling against the furniture, a deadly nausea overtook her, and she glanced despairingly towards the window; the outlying fields beyond the garden seemed to be undulating like a sea. For the first time she raised her voice, not in fear, but in a pathetic little cry of apology for her awkwardness in tumbling about, and not being able to grapple this new experience, and then she found herself near the door, which had once more swung free. She grasped it eagerly, and darted out of the study into the deserted passage. Here some instinct made her follow the line of the wall, rather than the shaking balusters of the corridor and staircase, but before she reached the bottom she heard a shout, and the farm labourer she had seen coming towards her seized her by the arm, dragged her to the open doorway of the drawing-room, and halted beneath its arch in the wall. Another thrill, but lighter than before, passed through the building, then all was still again.

"It's over; I reckon that's all just now," said the man coolly. "It's quite safe to cut and run for the garden now, through this window." He half led, half lifted her through the French window to the verandah and the ground, and locking her arm in his, ran quickly forward a hundred feet from the house, stopping at last beneath a large post oak where there was a rustic seat, into which she sank. "You're safe now, I reckon," he said grimly.

She looked towards the house; the sun was shining brightly, a cool breeze seemed to have sprung up as they ran. She could see a quantity of rubbish lying on the roof, from which a dozen yards of zinc gutter were perilously hanging; the broken shafts of the farther cluster of chimneys, a pile of bricks scattered upon the ground and among the battered down beams of the end of the verandah—but that was all. She lifted her now whitened face to the man, and with the apologetic smile still lingering on her lips, asked—

“What does it all mean? What has happened?”

The man stared at her. “D’ye mean to say ye don’t know?”

“How could I? They must have all left the house as soon as it began. I was talking to—to M. l’Hommadieu, and he suddenly left.”

The man brought his face angrily down within an inch of her own. “D’ye mean to say that them d——d French half-breeds stampeded and left yer there alone?”

She was still too much stupefied by the reaction to fully comprehend his meaning, and repeated feebly, with her smile still faintly lingering, “But you don’t tell me *what* it was?”

“An earthquake,” said the man roughly, “and if it had lasted ten seconds longer it would have shook the whole shanty down and left you under it. Yer kin tell *that* to them, if they don’t know it; but from the way they made tracks to the fields, I reckon they did. They’re coming now.”

Without another word he turned away half surlily, half defiantly, passing scarce fifty yards away Mrs. Randolph and her daughter, who were hastening towards their guest.

“Oh, here you are!” said Mrs. Randolph, with the nearest approach to effusion that Rose had yet seen in her manner. “We were wondering where you had run to, and were getting quite concerned. Emile was looking for you everywhere.”

The recollection of his blank and abject face, his vague

outcry and blind fright, came back to Rose with a shock that sent a flash of sympathetic shame to her face. The ingenuous Adele noticed it, and dutifully pinched her mother's arm.

"Emile?" echoed Rose faintly—"looking for *me*?"

Mother and daughter exchanged glances.

"Yes," said Mrs. Randolph cheerfully; "he says he started to run with you, but you got ahead and slipped out of the garden door—or something of the kind," she added, with the air of making light of Rose's girlish fears. "You know one scarcely knows what one does at such times, and it must have been all frightfully strange to *you*—and he's been quite distracted—lest you should have wandered away. Adele, run and tell him Miss Mallory has been here under the oak all the time."

Rose started—and then fell hopelessly back in her seat. Perhaps it *was* true! Perhaps he had not rushed off with that awful face and without a word. Perhaps she herself had been half frightened out of her reason. In the simple weak kindness of her nature it seemed less dreadful to believe that the fault was partly her own.

"And you went back into the house to look for us when all was over," said Mrs. Randolph, fixing her black beady magnetic eyes on Rose, "and that stupid yokel Jake brought you out again. He needn't have clutched your arm so closely, my dear—I must speak to the Major about his excessive familiarity—but I suppose I shall be told that that is American freedom. I call it 'a liberty.'"

It struck Rose that she had not even thanked the man—in the same flash that she remembered something dreadful that he had said. She covered her face with her hands and tried to recall herself.

Mrs. Randolph gently tapped her shoulder with a mixture of maternal philosophy and discipline, and continued: "Of

course it's an upset—and you're confused still. That's nothing. They say, dear, it's perfectly well known that no two people's recollections of these things ever are the same. It's really ridiculous, the contradictory stories one hears. Isn't it, Emile?"

Rose felt that the young man had joined them, and was looking at her. In the fear that she should still see some trace of the startled selfish animal in his face, she did not dare to raise her eyes to his, but looked at his mother. Mrs. Randolph was standing then, collected but impatient.

"It's all over now," said Emile in his usual voice, "and except the chimneys and some fallen plaster there's really no damage done. But I'm afraid they have caught it pretty badly at the Mission and at San Francisco, in those tall, flashy, rattle-trap buildings they're putting up. I've just sent off one of the men for news."

Her father was in San Francisco by that time; and she had never thought of *him*! In her quick remorse she now forgot all else and rose to her feet.

"I must telegraph to my father at once," she said hurriedly; "he is there."

"You had better wait until the messenger returns and hear his news," said Emile. "If the shock was only a slight one in San Francisco, your father might not understand you, and would be alarmed."

She could see his face now—there was no record of the past expression upon it, but he was watching her eagerly. Mrs. Randolph and Adele had moved away to speak to the servants. Emile drew nearer.

"You surely will not desert us now?" he said in a low voice.

"Please don't," she said vaguely. "I'm so worried," and, pushing quickly past him, she hurriedly rejoined the two women.

They were superintending the erection of a long tent or marquee in the garden, hastily extemporised from the awnings of the verandah and other cloth. Mrs. Randolph explained that, although all danger was over, there was the possibility of the recurrence of lighter shocks during the day and night, and that they would all feel much more secure and comfortable to camp out for the next twenty-four hours in the open air.

"Only imagine you're picnicking, and you'll enjoy it as most people usually enjoy those horrid *al fresco* entertainments. I don't believe there's the slightest real necessity for it, but," she added in a lower voice, "the Irish and Chinese servants are so demoralised now, they wouldn't stay indoors with us. It's a common practice here, I believe, for a day or two after the shock, and it gives time to put things right again and clear up. The old, one-storied, Spanish houses, with walls three feet thick, and built round a courtyard or *patio*, were much safer. It's only when the Americans try to improve upon the old order of things with their pinchbeck shams and stucco that Providence interferes like this to punish them."

It was the fact, however, that Rose was more impressed by what seemed to her the absolute indifference of Providence in the matter, and the cool resumption by Nature of her ordinary conditions. The sky above their heads was as rigidly blue as ever, and as smilingly monotonous; the distant prospect, with its clear, well-known silhouettes, had not changed; the crows swung on lazy, deliberate wings over the grain as before; and the trade wind was again blowing in its quiet persistency. And yet she knew that something had happened that would never again make her enjoyment of the prospect the same; that nothing would ever be as it was yesterday. I think at first she referred only to the material and larger phenomena, and did not confound this

revelation of the insecurity of the universe with her experience of man. Yet the fact also remained that to the conservative, correct, and, as she believed, secure condition to which she had been approximating, all her relations were rudely shaken and upset. It really seemed to this simple-minded young woman that the revolutionary disturbance of settled conditions might have as Providential an origin as the "Divine Right" of which she had heard so much.

CHAPTER IV.

IN her desire to be alone and to evade the now significant attentions of Emile, she took advantage of the bustle that followed the hurried transfer of furniture and articles from the house to escape through the garden to the outlying fields. Striking into one of the dusty lanes that she remembered, she wandered on for half an hour, until her progress and meditation were suddenly arrested. She had come upon a long chasm or crack in the soil, fully twenty feet wide and as many in depth, crossing her path at right angles. She did not remember having seen it before; the track of wheels went up to its precipitous edge; she could see the track on the other side, but the hiatus remained unbridged and uncovered. It was not there yesterday. She glanced right and left; the fissure seemed to extend like a moat or ditch, from the distant road to the upland between her and the great wheat valley below, from which she was shut off. An odd sense of being in some way a prisoner confronted her. She drew back with an impatient start, and perhaps her first real sense of indignation. A voice behind her, which she at once recognised, scarcely restored her calmness.

"You can't get across there, miss."

She turned. It was the young inventor from the wheat ranche, on horseback and with a clean face. He had just ridden out of the grain on the same side of the chasm as herself.

"But you seem to have got over," she said bluntly.

"Yes, but it was farther up the field. I reckoned that the split might be deeper but not so broad in the rock outcrop over there than in the adobe here. I found it so, and jumped it."

He looked as if he might—alert, intelligent, and self-contained. He lingered a moment, and then continued—

"I'm afraid you must have been badly shaken and a little frightened up there before the chimneys came down?"

"No," she was glad to say, briefly and she believed truthfully, "I wasn't frightened. I didn't even know it was an earthquake."

"Ah!" he reflected, "that was because you were a stranger. It's odd—they're all like that. I suppose it's because nobody really expects or believes in the unlooked-for thing, and yet that's the thing that always happens. And then, of course, that other affair, which really is serious, startled you the more."

She felt herself ridiculously and angrily blushing. "I don't know what you mean," she said icily. "What other affair?"

"Why, the well."

"The well?" she repeated vacantly.

"Yes; the artesian well has stopped. Didn't the Major tell you?"

"No," said the girl. "He was away; I haven't seen him yet."

"Well, the flow of water has ceased completely. That's what I'm here for. The Major sent for me, and I've been to examine it."

"And is that stoppage so very important?" she said dubiously.

It was his turn to look at her wonderingly.

"If it's *lost* entirely it means ruin for the ranche," he said sharply. He wheeled his horse, nodded gravely, and trotted off.

Major Randolph's figure of the "life-blood of the ranche" flashed across her suddenly. She knew nothing of irrigation, or the costly appliances by which the Californian agriculturist opposed the long summer droughts. She only vaguely guessed that the dreadful earthquake had struck at the prosperity of those people whom only a few hours ago she had been proud to call her friends. The underlying goodness of her nature was touched. Should she let a momentary fault—if it were not really, after all, only a misunderstanding—rise between her and them at such a moment? She turned and hurried quickly towards the house.

Hastening onward, she found time, however, to wonder also why these common men—she now included even the young inventor in that category—were all so rude and uncivil to *her*! She had never before been treated in this way; she had always been rather embarrassed by the admiring attentions of young men, clerks and collegians, in her Atlantic home, and of professional men—merchants and stockbrokers—in San Francisco. It was true they were not as continually devoted to her and to the nice art and etiquette of pleasing as Emile—they had other things to think about, being in business and not being *gentlemen*—but then they were greatly superior to these clowns, who took no notice of her, and rode off without lingering or formal leave-taking when their selfish affairs were concluded. It must be the contact of the vulgar earth—this wretched, cracking, material, and yet ungovernable and lawless earth

—that so depraved them. She felt she would like to say this to some one—not her father, for he wouldn't listen to her, nor to the Major, who would laughingly argue with her, but to Mrs. Randolph, who would understand her, and perhaps say it some day in her own sharp, sneering way to those very clowns. With these gentle sentiments irradiating her blue eyes and putting a pink flush upon her fair cheeks, Rose reached the garden with the intention of rushing sympathetically into Mrs. Randolph's arms. But it suddenly occurred to her that she would be obliged to state how she became aware of this misfortune, and with it came an instinctive aversion to speak of her meeting with the inventor. She would wait until Mrs. Randolph told her. But although that lady was engaged in a low-voiced discussion in French with Emile and Adele, which instantly ceased at her approach, there was no allusion made to the new calamity. "You need not telegraph to your father," she said as Rose approached; "he has already telegraphed to you for news. As you were out and the messenger was waiting an answer, we opened the despatch, and sent one telling him that you were all right, and that he need not hurry here on your account. So you are satisfied, I hope." A few hours ago this would have been true, and Rose would have probably seen in the action of her hostess only a flattering motherly supervision; there was, in fact, still a lingering trace of trust in her mind; yet she was conscious that she would have preferred to answer the despatch herself, and to have let her father come. To a girl brought up with a belief in the right of individual independence of thought and action there was something in Mrs. Randolph's practical ignoring of that right which startled her in spite of her new conservatism, while, as the daughter of a business man, her instincts revolted against Mrs. Randolph's unbusiness-like action with the telegram, however vulgar and unrefined she may have

begun to consider a life of business. The result was a certain constraint and embarrassment in her manner, which, however, had the laudable effect of limiting Emile's attention to significant glances, and was no doubt variously interpreted by the others. But she satisfied her conscience by determining to make a confidence of her sympathy to the Major on the first opportunity.

This she presently found when the others were pre-occupied ; the Major greeting her with a somewhat careworn face, but a voice whose habitual kindness was unchanged. When he had condoled with her on the terrifying phenomenon that had marred her visit to the ranche—and she could not help impatiently noticing that he too seemed to have accepted his wife's theory that she had been half deliriously frightened—he regretted that her father had not concluded to come down to the ranche, as his practical advice would have been invaluable in this emergency. She was about to eagerly explain why, when it occurred to her that Mrs. Randolph had only given him a suppressed version of the telegram, and that she would be betraying her or again taking sides in this partisan-divided home. With some hesitation she had at last alluded to the accident to the artesian well. The Major did not ask her how she had heard of it ; it was a bad business, he thought, but it might not be a total loss. The water may have been only diverted by the shock, and might be found again at the lower level, or in some lateral fissure. He had sent hurriedly for Tom Bent—that clever young engineer at the wheat ranche, who was always studying up these things with his inventions—and that was his opinion. No, Tom was not a well-digger, but it was generally known that he had “located” one or two, and had long ago advised the tapping of that flow by a second boring, in case of just such an emergency. He was coming again to-morrow. By the way, he had asked how the young

lady visitor was, and hoped she had not been alarmed by the earthquake !

Rose felt herself again blushing, and, what was more singular, with an unexpected and it seemed to her ridiculous pleasure, although outwardly she appeared to ignore the civility completely. And she had no intention of being so easily placated. If this young man thought by mere perfunctory civilities to her *host* to make up for his clownishness to *her*, he was mistaken. She would let him see it when he called to-morrow. She quickly turned the subject by assuring the Major of her sympathy and her intention of sending for her father. For the rest of the afternoon and during their *al fresco* dinner she solved the difficulty of her strained relations with Mrs. Randolph and Emile by conversing chiefly with the Major, tacitly avoiding, however, any allusion to this Mr. Bent. But Mrs. Randolph was less careful.

"You don't really mean to say, Major," she began in her driest, grittiest manner, "that instead of sending to San Francisco for some skilled master-mechanic, you are going to listen to the vagaries of a conceited, half-educated farm-labourer, and employ him? You might as well call in some of those wizards or water-witches at once." But the Major, like many other well-managed husbands who are good-humouredly content to suffer in the sunshine of prosperity, had no idea of doing so in adversity, and the prospect of being obliged to go back to youthful struggles had recalled some of the independence of that period. He looked up quietly and said—

"If his conclusions are as clear and satisfactory to-morrow as they were to-day, I shall certainly try to secure his services."

"Then I can only say *I* would prefer the water-witch. He at least would not represent a class of neighbours who

have made themselves systematically uncivil and disagreeable to us."

"I am afraid, Josephine, we have not tried to make ourselves particularly agreeable to *them*," said the Major.

"If that can only be done by admitting their equality, I prefer they should remain uncivil. Only let it be understood, Major, that if you choose to take this Tom-the-ploughboy to mend your well, you will at least keep him there while he is on the property."

With what retort the Major would have kept up this conjugal discussion already beginning to be awkward to the discreet visitor is not known, as it was suddenly stopped by a bullet from the rosebud lips of the ingenuous Adele.

"Why, he's very handsome when his face is clean, and his hands are small and not at all hard. And he doesn't talk the least bit queer or common."

There was a dead silence. "And pray, where did *you* see him, and what do you know about his hands?" asked Mrs. Randolph, in her most desiccated voice. "Or has the Major already presented you to him? I shouldn't be surprised."

"No, but"—hesitated the young girl, with a certain mouse-like audacity—"when you sent me to look after Miss Mallory, I came up to him just after he had spoken to her, and he stopped to ask me how we all were, and if Miss Mallory was really frightened by the earthquake, and he shook hands for good afternoon—that's all."

"And who taught you to converse with common strangers and shake hands with them?" continued Mrs. Randolph, with narrowing lips.

"Nobody, mamma; but I thought if Miss Mallory, who is a young lady, could speak to him, so could I, who am not out yet."

"We won't discuss this any further at present," said Mrs.

Randolph stiffly, as the Major smiled grimly at Rose. "The earthquake seems to have shaken down in this house more than the chimneys."

It certainly had shaken all power of sleep from the eyes of Rose when the household at last dispersed to lie down in their clothes on the mattresses which had been arranged under the awnings. She was continually starting up from confused dreams of the ground shaking under her, or she seemed to be standing on the brink of some dreadful abyss like the great chasm on the grain-field, when it began to tremble and crumble beneath her feet. It was near morning when, unable to endure it any longer, she managed without disturbing the sleeping Adele, who occupied the same curtained recess with her, to slip out from the awning. Wrapped in a thick shawl, she made her way through the encompassing trees and bushes of the garden that had seemed to imprison and suffocate her to the edge of the grain-field, where she could breathe the fresh air beneath an open, starlit sky. There was no moon, and the darkness favoured her; she had no fears that weighed against the horror of seclusion with her own fancies. Besides, they were camping *out* of the house, and if she chose to sit up or walk about no one could think it strange. She wished her father were here, that she might have some one of her own kin to talk to, yet she knew not what to say to him if he had come. She wanted somebody to sympathise with her feelings—or rather, perhaps, some one to combat and even ridicule the uneasiness that had lately come over her. She knew what her father would say: "Do you want to go, or do you want to stay here? Do you like these people, or do you not?" She remembered the one or two glowing and enthusiastic accounts she had written him of her visit here, and felt herself blushing again. What would he think of Mrs. Randolph's opening and answering the telegram?

Wouldn't he find out from the Major if she had garbled the sense of his despatch?

Away to the right, in the midst of the distant and invisible wheat-field, there was the same intermittent star, which like a living, breathing thing seemed to dilate in glowing respiration, as she had seen it the first night of her visit. Mr. Bent's forge! It must be nearly daylight now; the poor fellow had been up all night, or else was stealing this early march on the day. She recalled Adele's sudden eulogium of him. The first natural smile that had come to her lips since the earthquake broke up her nervous restraint, and sent her back more like her old self to her couch.

But she had not proceeded far towards the tent, when she heard the sound of low voices approaching her. It was the Major and his wife, who, like herself, had evidently been unable to sleep, and were up betimes. A new instinct of secretiveness which she felt was partly the effect of her artificial surroundings checked her first natural instinct to call to them, and she drew back deeper in the shadow to let them pass. But to her great discomfiture, the Major in a conversational emphasis stopped directly in front of her.

"You are wrong, I tell you, a thousand times wrong. The girl is simply upset by this earthquake. It's a great pity her father didn't come instead of telegraphing. And, by Jove, rather than hear any more of this, I'll send for him myself," said the Major, in an energetic but suppressed voice.

"And the girl won't thank you, and you'll be a fool for your pains," returned Mrs. Randolph, with dry persistency.

"But, according to your own ideas of propriety, Mallory ought to be the first one to be consulted—and by me, too."

"Not in this case. Of course, before any actual engagement is on, you can speak of Emile's attentions."

"But suppose Mallory has other views? Suppose he declines the honour? The man is no fool."

"Thank you. But for that very reason he must. Listen to me, Major: if he doesn't care to please his daughter for her own sake, he will have to do so for the sake of decency. Yes, I tell you, she has thoroughly compromised herself—quite enough, if it is ever known, to spoil any other engagement her father may make. Why, ask Adele! The day of the earthquake she *absolutely* had the audacity to send him out of the room upstairs into your study for her fan, and then follow him up there alone. The servants knew it. I knew it, for I was in her room at the time with Father Antonio. The earthquake made it plain to everybody. Decline it!—No. Mr. Mallory will think twice about it before he does that.—What's that? Who's there?"

There was a sudden rustle in the bushes like the passage of some frightened animal—and then all was still again.

CHAPTER V.

THE sun, an hour high, but only just topping the greenish crests of the wheat, was streaming like the morning breeze through the open length of Tom Bent's workshed. An exaggerated and prolonged shadow of the young inventor himself at work beside his bench was stretching itself far into the broken-down ranks of stalks towards the invisible road, and falling at the very feet of Rose Mallory as she emerged from them.

She was very pale, very quiet, and very determined. The travelling mantle thrown over her shoulders was dusty, the ribbons that tied her hat under her round chin had become unloosed. She advanced, walking down the line of shadow directly towards him.

"I am afraid I will have to trouble you once more," she said, with a faint smile, which did not, however, reach her

perplexed eyes. "Could you give me any kind of a conveyance that would take me to San José at once?"

The young man had started at the rustling of her dress in the shavings and turned eagerly. The faintest indication of a loss of interest was visible for an instant in his face, but it quickly passed into a smile of recognition. Yet she felt that he had neither noticed any change in her appearance, nor experienced any wonder at seeing her there at that hour.

"I did not take a buggy from the house," she went on quickly, "for I left early, and did not want to disturb them. In fact, they don't know that I am gone. I was worried at not hearing news from my father in San Francisco since the earthquake, and I thought I would run down to San José to inquire without putting them to any trouble. Anything will do that you have ready, if I can take it at once."

Still without exhibiting the least surprise, Bent nodded affirmatively, put down his tools, begged her to wait a moment, and ran off in the direction of the cabin. As he disappeared behind the wheat she lapsed quite suddenly against the work-bench, but recovered herself a moment later, leaning with her back against it, her hands grasping it on either side, and her knit brows and determined little face turned towards the road. Then she stood erect again, shook the dust out of her skirts, lifted her veil, wiped her cheeks and brow with the corner of a small handkerchief, and began walking up and down the length of the shed as Bent reappeared.

He was accompanied by the man who had first led her through the wheat. He gazed upon her with apparently all the curiosity and concern that the other had lacked.

"You want to get to San José as quick as you can?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes," she said quickly, "if you can help me."

"You walked all the way from the Major's here?" he continued, without taking his eyes from her face.

"Yes," she answered, with an affectation of carelessness she had not shown to Bent. "But I started very early, it was cool and pleasant, and didn't seem far."

"I'll put you down in San José inside the hour. You shall have my horse and trotting sulky, and I'll drive you myself. Will that do?"

She looked at him wonderingly. She had not forgotten his previous restraint and gravity, but now his face seemed to have relaxed with some humorous satisfaction. She felt herself colouring slightly, but whether with shame or relief she could not tell.

"I shall be *so* much obliged to you," she replied hesitatingly; "and so will my father, I know."

"I reckon," said the man, with the same look of amused conjecture; then, with a quick, assuring nod, he turned away and dived into the wheat again.

"You're all right now, Miss Mallory," said Bent complacently. "Dawson will fix it. He's got a good horse, and he's a good driver too." He paused, and then added pleasantly, "I suppose they're all well up at the house?"

It was so evident that his remark carried no personal meaning to herself that she was obliged to answer carelessly, "Oh yes."

"I suppose you see a good deal of Miss Randolph—Miss Adele, I think you call her?" he remarked tentatively, and with a certain boyish enthusiasm which she had never conceived possible to his nature.

"Yes," she replied a little dryly; "she is the only young lady there." She stopped, remembering Adele's naïve description of the man before her, and said abruptly, "You know her, then?"

"A little," replied the young man modestly. "I see her

pretty often when I am passing the upper end of the ranche. She's very well brought up, and her manners are very refined—don't you think so?—and yet she's just as simple and natural as a country girl. 'There's a great deal in education after all, isn't there?' he went on confidentially, "and although," he lowered his voice and looked cautiously around him, "I believe that some of us here don't fancy her mother much, there's no doubt that Mrs. Randolph knows how to bring up her children. Some people think that kind of education is all artificial, and don't believe in it, but *I* do!"

With the consciousness that she was running away from these people, and the shameful disclosure she had heard last night—with the recollection of Adele's scandalous interpretation of her most innocent actions, and her sudden and complete revulsion against all that she had previously admired in that household—to hear this man, who had seemed to her a living protest against their ideas and principles, now expressing them and holding them up for emulation, almost took her breath away.

"I suppose that means you intend to fix Major Randolph's well for him?" she said dryly.

"Yes," he returned, without noticing her manner; "and I think I can find that water again. I've been studying it up all night, and do you know what I'm going to do? I am going to make the earthquake that lost it help me to find it again." He paused, and looked at her with a smile and a return of his former enthusiasm. "Do you remember the crack in the adobe field that stopped you yesterday?"

"Yes," said the girl, with a slight shiver.

"I told you then that the same crack was a split in the rock outcrop farther up the plain, and was deeper. I am satisfied now, from what I have seen, that it is really a rupture of the whole strata all the way down. That's the one

weak point that the imprisoned water is sure to find, and that's where the borer will tap it—in the new well that the earthquake itself has sunk."

It seemed to her now that she understood his explanation perfectly, and she wondered the more he had been so mistaken in his estimate of Adele. She turned away a little impatiently and looked anxiously towards the point where Dawson had disappeared. Bent followed her eyes.

"He'll be here in a moment, Miss Mallory. He has to drive slowly through the grain, but I hear the wheels." He stopped, and his voice took up its previous note of boyish hesitation. "By the way—I'll—I'll be going up to the Rancho this afternoon to see the Major. Have you any message for Mrs. Randolph—or for—for Miss Adele?"

"No—," said Rose hesitatingly, "and—and——"

"I see," interrupted Bent carelessly. "You don't want anything said about your coming here. I won't."

It struck her that he seemed to have no ulterior meaning in the suggestion. But before she could make any reply, Dawson reappeared, driving a handsome mare harnessed to a light spider-like vehicle. He had also assumed, evidently in great haste, a black frock-coat buttoned over his waistcoatless and cravatless shirt, and a tall black hat, that already seemed to be cracking in the sunlight. He drove up, at once assisted her to the narrow perch beside him, and with a nod to Bent drove off. His breathless expedition relieved the leave-taking of these young people of any ceremony.

"I suppose," said Mr. Dawson, giving a half glance over his shoulder as they struck into the dusty highway, "I suppose you don't care to see anybody before you get to San José?"

"No—o—o," said Rose timidly.

"And I reckon you wouldn't mind my racin' a bit if anybody kem up?"

"No."

"The mare's sort o' fastidious about takin' anybody's dust."

"Is she?" said Rose, with a faint smile.

"Awful," responded her companion; "and the queerest thing of all is, she can't bear to have any one behind her either."

He leaned forward, with his expression of humorous enjoyment of some latent joke, and did something with the reins—Rose never could clearly understand what, though it seemed to her that he simply lifted them with ostentatious lightness—but the mare suddenly appeared to *lengthen* herself and lose her height, and the stalks of wheat on either side of the dusty track began to melt into each other, and then slipped like a flash into one long continuous shimmering green hedge. So perfect was the mare's action that the girl was scarcely conscious of any increased effort; so harmonious the whole movement that the light skeleton waggon seemed only a prolonged process of that long slim body and free collarless neck, both straight as the thin shafts on each side and straighter than the delicate ribbon-like traces which, in what seemed a mere affectation of conscious power hung at times almost limp between the whiffle-tree and the narrow breast-band which was all that confined the animal's powerful fore-quarters. So superb was the reach of its long easy stride that Rose could scarcely see any undulations in the brown shining back, on which she could have placed her foot, nor feel the soft beat of the delicate hoofs that took the dust so firmly and yet so lightly.

The rapidity of motion, which kept them both with heads bent forward and seemed to force back any utterance that rose to their lips, spared Rose the obligation of conversation, and her companion was equally reticent. But it was evident to her that he half suspected she was running away from the

Randolphs, and that she wished to avoid the embarrassment of being overtaken even in persuasive pursuit. It was not possible that he knew the cause of her flight, and yet she could not account for his evident desire to befriend her, nor, above all, for his apparently humorous enjoyment of the situation. Had he taken it gravely she might have been tempted to partly confide in him and ask his advice. Was she doing right, after all? Ought she not to have stayed long enough to speak her mind to Mrs. Randolph and demand to be sent home. No! She had not only shrunk from repeating the infamous slander she had overheard, but she had a terrible fear that if she had done so Mrs. Randolph was capable of denying it or even charging her with being still under the influence of the earthquake shock and of walking in her sleep. No! She could not trust her—she could trust no one there. Had not even the Major listened to those infamous lies? Had she not seen that he was helpless in the hands of this cabal in his own household—a cabal that she herself had thoughtlessly joined against him.

They had reached the first slight ascent. Her companion drew out his watch, looked at it with satisfaction, and changed the position of his hands on the reins. Without being able to detect the difference, she felt they were slackening speed. She turned inquiringly towards him; he nodded his head, with a half smile and a gesture to her to look ahead. The spires of San José were already faintly uplifting from the distant fringe of oaks.

So soon! In fifteen minutes she would be there—and *then!* She remembered suddenly she had not yet determined what to do. Should she go on at once to San Francisco, or telegraph to her father and await him at San José? In either case a new fear of the precipitancy of her action and the inadequacy of her reasons had sprung up in her mind. Would her father understand her? Would he under-

rate the cause and be mortified at the insult she had given the family of his old friend, or, more dreadful still, would he exaggerate her wrongs, and seek a personal quarrel with the Major? He was a man of quick temper, and had the Western ideas of redress. Perhaps even now she was precipitating a duel between them. Her cheeks grew wan again, her breath came quickly, tears gathered in her eyes. Oh, she was a dreadful girl, she knew it; she was an utterly miserable one, and she knew that too!

The reins were tightened. The pace lessened, and at last fell to a walk. Conscious of her tell-tale eyes and troubled face, she dared not turn to her companion to ask him why, but glanced across the fields.

"When you first came I didn't get to know your name, Miss Mallory, but I reckon I know your father."

Her father! What made him say that? She wanted to speak, but she felt she could not. In another moment, if he went on, she must do *something*—she would cry!

"I reckon you'll be wanting to go to the hotel first, anyway?"

There!—she knew it! He *would* keep on! And now she had burst into tears.

The mare was still walking slowly; the man was lazily bending forward over the shafts as if nothing had occurred. Then suddenly, illogically, and without a moment's warning, the pride that had sustained her crumbled and became as the dust of the road.

She burst out and told him—this stranger!—this man she had disliked!—all and *everything*. How she had felt, how she had been deceived, and what she had overheard!

"I thought as much," said her companion quietly, "and that's why I sent for your father."

"You sent for my father!—when?—where?" echoed Rose, in astonishment.

"Yesterday. He was to come to-day, and if we don't find him at the hotel it will be because he has already started to come here by the upper and longer road. But you leave it to *me*, and don't you say anything to him of this now. If he's at the hotel I'll say I drove you down there to show off the mare. *Sabe?* If he isn't, I'll leave you there and come back here to find him. I've got something to tell him that will set *you* all right." He smiled grimly, lifted the reins, the mare started forward again, and the vehicle and its occupants disappeared in a vanishing dust cloud.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was nearly noon when Mr. Dawson finished rubbing down his sweating mare in the little stable shed among the wheat. He had left Rose at the hotel, for they found Mr. Mallory had previously started by a circuitous route for the wheat ranche. He had resumed not only his working clothes but his working expression. He was now superintending the unloading of a wain of stores and implements when the light carry-all of the Randolphs rolled into the field. It contained only Mrs. Randolph and the driver. A slight look of intelligence passed between the latter and the nearest one of Dawson's companions, succeeded, however, by a dull look of stupid vacancy on the faces of all the others, including Dawson. Mrs. Randolph noticed it, and was forewarned. She reflected that no human beings ever looked *naturally* as stupid as that and were able to work. She smiled sarcastically, and then began with dry distinctness and narrowing lips.

"Miss Mallory, a young lady visiting us, went out for an early walk this morning, and has not returned. It is possible

“He may have lost her way among your wheat. Have you seen anything of her?”

Dawson raised his eyes from his work and glanced slowly around at his companions, as if taking the heavy sense of the assembly. One or two shook their heads mechanically, and returned to their suspended labour. He said coolly—

“Nobody here seems to.”

She felt that they were lying. She was only a woman against five men. She was only a petty domestic tyrant; she might have been a larger one. But she had all the courage of that possibility.

“Major Randolph and my son are away,” she went on, sitting herself erect. “But I know that the Major will pay me liberally if these men will search the field, besides making it right with your—*employers*—for the loss of time.”

Dawson uttered a single word in a low voice to the man nearest him, who apparently communicated it to the others, and the four men stopped unloading and moved away one after the other—even the driver joining in the exodus. Mrs. Randolph smiled sarcastically; it was plain that these people, with all their boasted independence, were quite amenable to pecuniary considerations. Nevertheless, as Dawson remained looking quietly at her, she said—

“Then I suppose they’ve concluded to go and see?”

“No; I’ve sent them away so that they couldn’t *hear*.”

“Hear what?”

“What I’ve got to say to you.”

She looked at him suddenly. Then she said, with a disdainful glance around her, “I see I am helpless here, and thanks to your trickery—alone. Have a care, sir; I warn you that you will have to answer to Major Randolph for any insolence.”

“I reckon you won’t tell Major Randolph what I have to say to you,” he returned coolly.

Her lips were nearly a greyish hue, but she said scornfully, "And why not? Do you know who you are talking to?"

The man came lazily forward to the carry-all, carelessly brushed aside the slack reins, and resting his elbows on the horse's back, laid his chin on his hands, as he looked up in the woman's face.

"Yes; I know who I'm talking to," he said coolly. "But as the Major don't, I reckon you won't tell him."

"Stand away from that horse," she said, her whole face taking the greyish colour of her lips, but her black eyes growing smaller and brighter. "Hand me those reins and let me pass. What *canaille* are you to stop me?"

"I thought so," returned the man, without altering his position, "you don't know *me*. You never saw *me* before. Well, I'm Jim Dawson, the nephew of L'Hommadiou, *your old master!*"

She gripped the iron rail of the seat as if to leap from it, but checked herself suddenly and leaned back, with a set smile on her mouth that seemed stamped there. It was remarkable that with that smile she flung away her old affectation of superciliousness for an older and ruder audacity, and that not only the expression but the type of her face appeared to have changed.

"I don't say," continued the man quietly, "that he didn't *marry* you before he died. But you know as well as I do that the laws of his State didn't recognise the marriage of a master with his Octoroon slave! And you know as well as I do that even if he had freed you he couldn't change your blood. Why, if I'd been willing to stay at Avoyelles to be a nigger-driver like him, the plantation of 'de Fontanges'—whose name you have taken—would have been left to me. If *you* had stayed there you might have been my property instead of *your* owning a square man like Randolph. You

didn't think of that when you came here, did you?" he added composedly.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she said, dropping rapidly into a different accent, with her white teeth and fixed mirthless smile, "so it is a claim for *property*, eh? You're wanting money—you? *Très bien*, you forget we are in California, where one does not own a slave. And you have a fine story there, my poor friend. Very pretty, but very hard to prove, *m'sieu*. And these peasants are in it, eh, working it on shares like the farm, eh?"

"Well," said Dawson, slightly changing his position, and passing his hand over the horse's neck with a half-wearied contempt, "one of these men is from Plaquemine and the other from Coupée. They know all the L'Hommadieus' history. And they know a streak of the tar-brush when they see it. They took your measure when they came here last year, and sized you up fairly. So had I, for the matter of that, when I *first* saw you. And we compared notes. But the Major is a square man, for all he is your husband, and we reckoned he had a big enough contract on his hands to take care of you and L'Hommadieu's half-breeds, and so"—he tossed the reins contemptuously aside—"we kept this to ourselves."

"And now you want—what—eh?"

"We want an end to this foolery," he broke out roughly, stepping back from the vehicle and facing her suddenly, with his first angry gesture. "We want an end to these airs and grimaces, and all this dandy nigger business; we want an end to this 'cake-walking' through the wheat, and flouting of the honest labour of your betters. We want you and your 'de Fontanges' to climb down. And we want an end to this ropin'-in of white folks to suit your little game; we want an end to your trying to mix your nigger blood with any one here, and we intend to stop it. We draw the line at the Major."

Lashed as she had been by those words apparently out of all semblance of her former social arrogance, a lower and more stubborn resistance seemed to have sprung up in her, as she sat sideways, watching him with her set smile and contracting eyes.

"Ah," she said dryly, "so *she is here*. I thought so. Which of you is it, eh? It's a good spec—Mallory's a rich man. She's not particular."

The man had stopped as if listening, his head turned towards the road. Then he turned carelessly, and facing her again, waved his hand with a gesture of tired dismissal, and said, "Go! You'll find your driver over there by the tool-shed. He has heard nothing yet—but I've given you fair warning. Go!"

He walked slowly back towards the shed as the woman, snatching up the reins, drove violently off in the direction where the men had disappeared. But she turned aside, ignoring her waiting driver in her wild and reckless abandonment of all her old conventional attitudes, and lashing her horse forward with the same set smile on her face, the same odd relaxation of figure, and the same squaring of her elbows.

Avoiding the main road, she pushed into a narrow track that intersected another nearer the scene of the accident to Rose's buggy three weeks before. She had nearly passed it when she was hailed by a strange voice, and looking up, perceived a horseman floundering in the mazes of the wheat to one side of the track. Whatever mean thought of her past life she was flying from, whatever mean purpose she was flying to, she pulled up suddenly, and as suddenly resumed her erect aggressive stiffness. The stranger was a middle-aged man, in dress and appearance a dweller of cities. He lifted his hat as he perceived the occupant of the waggon to be a lady.

"I beg your pardon, but I fear I've lost my way in trying to make a short cut to the Excelsior Company's Rancho."

"You are in it now," said Mrs. Randolph quickly.

"Thank you, but where can I find the farmhouse?"

"There is none," she returned, with her old superciliousness, "unless you choose to give that name to the shanties and sheds where the labourers and servants live near the road."

The stranger looked puzzled. "I'm looking for a Mr. Dawson," he said reflectively, "but I may have made some mistake. Do you know Major Randolph's house hereabouts?"

"I do. I am Mrs. Randolph," she said stiffly.

The stranger's brow cleared, and he smiled pleasantly. "Then this is a fortunate meeting," he said, raising his hat again as he reined in his horse beside the waggon, "for I am Mr. Mallory, and I was looking forward to the pleasure of presenting myself to you an hour or two later. The fact is, an old acquaintance, Mr. Dawson, telegraphed me yesterday to meet him here on urgent business, and I felt obliged to go there first."

Mrs. Randolph's eyes sparkled with a sudden gratified intelligence, but her manner seemed rather to increase than abate its grim precision.

"Our meeting this morning, Mr. Mallory, is both fortunate and unfortunate, for I regret to say that your daughter, who has not been quite herself since the earthquake, was missing early this morning and has not yet been found, though we have searched everywhere. Understand me," she said, as the stranger started, "I have no fear for her *personal* safety; I am only concerned for any *indiscretion* that she may commit in the presence of these strangers whose company she would seem to prefer to ours."

"But I don't understand you, madam," said Mallory sternly; "you are speaking of my daughter, and——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Mallory," said Mrs. Randolph, lifting her hand with her driest deprecation and her most desiccating smile, "I'm not passing judgment or criticism. I am of a foreign race, and consequently do not understand the freedom of American young ladies, and their familiarity with the opposite sex. I make no charges; I only wish to assure you that she will no doubt be found in the company and under the protection of her own countrymen. There is," she added with ironical distinctness, "a young mechanic, or field hand, or 'quack well-doctor,' whom she seems to admire, and with whom she appears to be on equal terms."

Mallory regarded her for a moment fixedly, and then his sternness relaxed to a mischievously complacent smile. "That must be young Bent, of whom I've heard," he said, with unabated cheerfulness. "And I don't know but what she may be with him, after all. For now I think of it, a chuckle-headed fellow, of whom a moment ago I inquired the way to your house, told me I'd better ask the young man and young woman who were 'philandering through the wheat' yonder. Suppose we look for them. From what I've heard of Bent, he's too much wrapped up in his inventions for flirtation, but it would be a good joke to stumble upon them."

Mrs. Randolph's eyes sparkled with a mingling of gratified malice and undisguised contempt for the fatuous father beside her. But before she could accept or decline the challenge, it had become useless. A murmur of youthful voices struck her ear, and she suddenly stood upright and transfixed in the carriage. For lounging down slowly towards them out of the dim green aisles of the arbour'd wheat, lost in themselves and the shimmering veil of their seclusion, came the engineer, Thomas Bent, and on his

arm, gazing ingenuously into his face, the figure of Adele—her own perfect daughter.

"I don't think, my dear," said Mr. Mallory, as the anxious Rose flew into his arms on his return to San José a few hours later, "that it will be necessary for you to go back again to Major Randolph's before we leave. I have said 'Good-bye' for you and thanked them, and your trunks are packed and will be sent here. The fact is, my dear, you see this affair of the earthquake and the disaster to the artesian well have upset all their arrangements, and I am afraid that my little girl would be only in their way just now."

"And you have seen Mr. Dawson—and you know why he sent for you?" asked the young girl, with nervous eagerness.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Mallory thoughtfully. "*that* was really important. You see, my child," he continued, taking her hand in one of his own and patting the back of it gently with the other, "we think, Dawson and I, of taking over the Major's ranche and incorporating it with the Excelsior in one, to be worked on shares like the Excelsior; and as Mrs. Randolph is very anxious to return to the Atlantic States with her children, it is quite possible. Mrs. Randolph, as you have possibly noticed," Mr. Mallory went on, still patting his daughter's hand, "does not feel entirely at home here, and will consequently leave the Major free to rearrange by himself the ranche on the new basis. In fact, as the change must be made before the crops come in, she talks of going next week. But if you like the place, Rose, I've no doubt the Major and Dawson will always find room for you and me when we run down there for a little fresh air."

"And did you have all that in your mind, papa, when you came down here, and was that what you and Mr. Dawson wanted to talk about?" said the astonished Rose.

"Mainly, my dear, mainly. You see I'm a capitalist now, and the real value of capital is to know how and when to apply it to certain conditions."

"And this Mr.—Mr. Bent—do you think—he will go on and find the water, papa?" said Rose hesitatingly.

"Ah! Bent—Tom Bent—oh yes," said Mallory with great heartiness. "Capital fellow, Bent! and mighty ingenious! Glad you met him! Well," thoughtfully but still heartily, "he may not find it exactly where he expected, but he'll find it or something better. We can't part with him, and he has promised Dawson to stay. We'll utilise *him*, you may be sure."

It would seem that they did, and from certain interviews and conversations that took place between Mr. Bent and Miss Mallory on a later visit, it would also appear that her father had exercised a discreet reticence in regard to a certain experiment of the young inventor, of which he had been an accidental witness.

A Mæcenas of the Pacific Slope.

CHAPTER I.

As Mr. Robert Rushbrook, known to an imaginative press as the "Mæcenas of the Pacific Slope," drove up to his country seat, equally referred to as a "palatial villa," he cast a quick but practical look at the pillared pretensions of that enormous shell of wood and paint and plaster. The statement, also a reportorial one, that its site, the Cañon of Los Osos, "some three years ago was disturbed only by the passing tread of bear and wild cat," had lost some of its freshness as a picturesque apology, and already successive improvements on the original building seemingly cast the older part of the structure back to a hoary antiquity. To many it stood as a symbol of everything Robert Rushbrook did or had done—an improvement of all previous performances ; it was like his own life—an exciting though irritating state of transition to something better. Yet the visible architectural result, as here shown, was scarcely harmonious ; indeed some of his friends—and Mæcenas had many—professed to classify the various improvements by the successive fortunate ventures in their owner's financial career, which had led to new additions, under the names of "The Comstock Lode Period," "The Union Pacific Renaissance," "The Great Wheat Corner," and "Water Front Gable Style," a humorous trifling that did not, however, prevent a few, who were artists, from accepting

Mæcenæ's liberal compensation for their services in giving shape to those ideas.

Relinquishing to a groom his fast-trotting team—the second relay in his two hours' drive from San Francisco—he leaped to the ground to meet the architect, already awaiting his orders in the courtyard. With his eyes still fixed upon the irregular building before him, he mingled his greeting and his directions.

"Look here, Barker, we'll have a wing thrown out here, and a hundred-foot ball-room. Something to hold a crowd ; something that can be used for music—*sabe* ?—a concert, or a show."

"Have you thought of any style, Mr. Rushbrook ?" suggested the architect.

"No," said Rushbrook ; "I've been thinking of the time—thirty days, and everything to be in. You'll stop to dinner. I'll have you sit near Jack Somers. You can talk style to him. Say I told you."

"You wish it completed in thirty days ?" repeated the architect dubiously.

"Well, I shouldn't mind if it were less. You can begin at once. There's a telegraph in the house. Patrick will take any message, and you can send up to San Francisco and fix things before dinner."

Before the man could reply Rushbrook was already giving a hurried interview to the gardener and others on his way to the front porch. In another moment he had entered his own hall—a wonderful temple of white and silver plaster, formal, yet friable, like the sugared erection of a wedding-cake—where his majordomo awaited him.

"Well, who's here ?" asked Rushbrook, still advancing towards his apartments.

"Dinner is set for thirty, sir," said the functionary, keeping step demurely with his master, "but Mr. Appleby takes

ten over to San Mateo, and some may sleep there. The *char-à-banc* is still out and five saddle-horses, to a picnic in Green Cañon, and I can't positively say, but I should think you might count on seeing about forty-five guests before you go to town to-morrow. The opera troupe seem to have not exactly understood the invitation, sir."

"How? I gave it myself."

"The chorus and supernumeraries thought themselves invited too, sir, and have come, I believe, sir. At least Signora Pegrelli and Madame Denise said so, and that they would speak to you about it, but that meantime I could put them up anywhere."

"And you made no distinction, of course?"

"No, sir; I put them in the corresponding rooms opposite, sir. I don't think the prima donnas like it."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir."

Whatever was in their minds, the two men never changed their steady, practical gravity of manner. The major-domo's appeared to be a subdued imitation of his master's, worn as he might have worn his master's clothes, had he accepted, or Mr. Rushbrook permitted such a degradation. By this time they had reached the door of Mr. Rushbrook's room, and the man paused. "I didn't include some guests of Mr. Leyton's, sir, that he brought over here to show around the place; but he told me to tell you he would take them away again, or leave them, as you liked. They're some Eastern strangers stopping with him."

"All right," said Rushbrook quietly, as he entered his own apartment. It was decorated as garishly as the hall, as staring and vivid in colour, but wholesomely new and clean for all its paint, veneering, and plaster. It was filled with heterogeneous splendour—all new and well kept, yet with so much of the attitude of the show-room still linger-

ing about it that one almost expected to see the various articles of furniture ticketed with their prices. A luxurious bed, with satin hangings and Indian carved posts, standing ostentatiously in a corner, kept up this resemblance, for in a curtained recess stood a worn camp bedstead, Rushbrook's real couch, Spartan in its simplicity.

Mr. Rushbrook drew his watch from his pocket, deliberately divested himself of his boots, coat, waistcoat, and cravat. Then rolling himself in a fleecy, blanket-like rug with something of the habitual dexterity of a frontiersman, he threw himself on his couch, closed his eyes, and went instantly to sleep. Lying there, he appeared to be a man comfortably middle-aged, with thick iron-grey hair that might have curled had he encouraged such indirection; a skin roughened and darkened by external hardships and exposure, but free from taint of inner vice or excess, and indistinctive features redeemed by a singularly handsome mouth. As the lower part of the face was partly hidden by a dense but closely-cropped beard, it is probable that the delicate outlines of his lips had gained something from their framing.

He slept, through what seemed to be the unnatural stillness of the large house—a quiet that might have come from the lingering influence of the still virgin solitude around it, as if Nature had forgotten the intrusion or were stealthily retaking her own; and later, through the rattle of returning wheels or the sound of voices, which were, however, promptly absorbed in that deep and masterful silence which was the unabdicating genius of the cañon. For it was remarkable that even the various artists, musicians, orators, and poets, whom Mæcenas had gathered in his cool business fashion under that roof, all seemed to become, by contrast with surrounding Nature, as new and artificial as the house, and as powerless to assert themselves against its influence.

He was still sleeping when James re-entered the room, but awoke promptly at the sound of his voice. In a few moments he had re-arranged his scarcely disordered toilette, and stepped out refreshed and observant into the hall. The guests were still absent from that part of the building, and he walked leisurely past the carelessly opened doors of the rooms they had left. Everywhere he met the same glaring ornamentation and colour, the same garishness of treatment, the same inharmonious extravagance of furniture, and everywhere the same troubled acceptance of it by the inmates, or the same sense of temporary and restricted tenancy. Dresses were hung over cheval glasses, clothes piled up on chairs to avoid the use of doubtful and too ornamented wardrobes, and in some cases more practical guests had apparently encamped in a corner of their apartment. A gentleman from Siskyou—sole proprietor of a mill patent now being considered by Mæcenas—had confined himself to a rocking-chair and clothes-horse, as being trustworthy and familiar; a bolder spirit from Yreka—in treaty for capital to start an independent journal devoted to Mæcenas's interests—had got a good deal out of, and indeed all he had *into*, a Louis XVI. *armoire*; while a young painter from Sacramento had simply retired into his adjoining bathroom, leaving the glories of his bedroom untarnished. Suddenly he paused.

He had turned into a smaller passage in order to make a shorter cut through one of the deserted suites of apartments that should bring him to that part of the building where he designed to make his projected improvement, when his feet were arrested on the threshold of a sitting-room. Although it contained the same decoration and furniture as the other rooms, it looked totally different! It was tasteful, luxurious, comfortable, and habitable. The furniture seemed to have fallen into harmonious position; even the staring decorations of the walls and ceiling were toned down by sprays of

laurel and red-stained *manzanito* boughs with their berries, apparently fresh plucked from the near cañon. But he was more unexpectedly impressed to see that the room was at that moment occupied by a tall handsome girl, who had paused to take breath, with her hand still on the heavy centre table she was moving. Standing there, graceful, glowing, and animated, she looked the living genius of the recreated apartment.

CHAPTER II.

MR. RUSHBROOK glanced rapidly at his unknown guest. "Excuse me," he said, with respectful business brevity, "but I thought every one was out," and he stepped backward quickly.

"I've only just come," she said, without embarrassment; "and would you mind, as you *are* here, giving me a lift with this table?"

"Certainly," replied Rushbrook, and under the young girl's direction the millionaire moved the table to one side.

During the operation he was trying to determine which of his unrecognised guests the fair occupant was. Possibly one of the Leyton party, that James had spoken of as impending.

"Then you have changed all the furniture, and put up these things?" he asked, pointing to the laurel.

"Yes, the room was really something *too* awful. It looks better now, don't you think?"

"A hundred per cent.," said Rushbrook promptly. "Look here, I'll tell you what you've done. You've set the furniture *to work*! It was simply lying still—with no return to anybody on the investment."

The young girl opened her grey eyes at this, and then smiled. The intruder seemed to be characteristic of Cali-

fornia. As for Rushbrook, he regretted that he did not know her better; he would at once have asked her to rearrange all the rooms, and have managed in some way to liberally reward her for it. A girl like that had no nonsense about her.

"Yes," she said; "I wonder Mr. Rushbrook don't look at it in that way. It is a shame that all these pretty things—and you know they really are good and valuable—shouldn't show what they are. But I suppose everybody here accepts the fact that this man simply buys them because they are valuable, and nobody interferes, and is content to humour him, laugh at him, and feel superior. It don't strike me as being quite fair; does it you?"

Rushbrook was pleased. Without the vanity that would be either annoyed at this revelation of his reputation, or gratified at her defence of it, he was simply glad to discover that she had not recognised him as her host, and could continue the conversation unreservedly. "Have you seen the lady's boudoir?" he asked. "You know, the room fitted with knick-knacks and pretty things—some of 'em bought from old collections in Europe, by fellows who knew what they were—but perhaps—" he added, looking into her eyes for the first time—"didn't know exactly what ladies care for."

"I merely glanced in there when I first came, for there was such a queer lot of women—I'm told he isn't very particular in that way—that I didn't stay."

"And you didn't think *they* might be just as valuable and good as some of the furniture, if they could have been pulled around and put into shape, or set in a corner, eh?"

The young girl smiled; she thought her fellow-guest rather amusing, none the less so perhaps for catching up her own ideas, but nevertheless she slightly shrugged her shoulders with that hopeless scepticism which women re-

serve for their own sex. "Some of them looked as if they had been pulled around, as you say, and hadn't been improved by it."

"There's no one there now," said Rushbrook, with practical directness; "come and take a look at it." She complied without hesitation, walking by his side, tall, easy, and self-possessed, apparently accepting without self-consciousness his half paternal, half comrade-like informality. The boudoir was a large room, repeating on a bigger scale the incongruousness and ill-fitting splendour of the others. When she had of her own accord recognised and pointed out the more admirable articles, he said, gravely looking at his watch, "We've just about seven minutes yet; if you'd like to pull and haul these things around, I'll help you."

The young girl smiled. "I'm quite content with what I've done in my own room, where I have no one's taste to consult but my own. I hardly know how Mr. Rushbrook, or his lady friends, might like my operating here." Then recognising with feminine tact the snub that might seem implied in her refusal, she said quickly, "Tell me something about our host—but first, look! isn't that pretty?"

She had stopped before the window that looked upon the dim blue abyss of the cañon, and was leaning out to gaze upon it. Rushbrook joined her.

"There isn't much to be changed down *there*, is there?" he said half interrogatively.

"No, not unless Mr. Rushbrook took it into his head to roof it in, and somebody was ready with a contract to do it. But what do you know of him? Remember, I'm quite a stranger here."

"You came with Charley Leyton?"

"With *Mrs.* Leyton's party," said the young girl, with a half-smiling emphasis. "But it seems that we don't know whether Mr. Rushbrook wants us here or not till he comes."

And the drollest thing about it is that they're all so perfectly frank about saying so."

"Charley and he are old friends, and you'll do well to trust to their judgment."

This was hardly the kind of response that the handsome and clever society girl before him had been in the habit of receiving, but it amused her. Her fellow-guest was decidedly original. But he hadn't told her about Rushbrook, and it struck her that his opinion would be independent at least. She reminded him of it.

"Look here," said Rushbrook, "you'll meet a man here to-night—or he'll be sure to meet *you*—who'll tell you all about Rushbrook. He's a smart chap, knows everybody, and talks well. His name is Jack Somers; he is a great ladies' man. He can talk to you about these sort of things too," indicating the furniture with a half tolerant, half contemptuous gesture, that struck her as inconsistent with what seemed to be his previous interest—"just as well as he can talk of people. Been in Europe, too."

The young girl's eye brightened with a quick vivacity at the name, but a moment after became reflective and slightly embarrassed. "I know him—I met him at Mr. Leyton's—he has already talked of Mr. Rushbrook, but—" she added, avoiding any conclusion, with a pretty pout, "I'd like to have the opinion of others. Yours, now, I fancy, would be quite independent."

"You stick to what Jack Somers has said, good or bad, and you won't be far wrong," he said assuringly. He stopped; his quick ear had heard approaching voices; he returned to her and held out his hand. As it seemed to her that in California everybody shook hands with everybody else on the slightest occasions, sometimes to save further conversation, she gave him her own. He shook it, less forcibly than she had feared, and abruptly left her. For

a moment she was piqued at this superior and somewhat brusque way of ignoring her request, but reflecting that it might be the awkwardness of an untrained man, she dismissed it from her mind. The voices of her friends in the already resounding passages also recalled her to the fact that she had been wandering about the house with a stranger, and she rejoined them a little self-consciously.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Leyton gaily, "it seems we are to stay. Leyton says Rushbrook won't hear of our going."

"Does that mean that your husband takes the whole opera troupe over to your house in exchange?"

"Don't be satirical, but congratulate yourself on your opportunity of seeing an awfully funny gathering. I wouldn't have you miss it for the world. It's the most characteristic thing out."

"Characteristic of what?"

"Of Rushbrook, of course. Nobody else would conceive of getting together such a lot of queer people."

"But don't it strike you that we're a part of the lot?"

"Perhaps," returned the lively Mrs. Leyton. "No doubt that's the reason why Jack Somers is coming over, and is so anxious that *you* should stay. I can't imagine why else he should rave about Miss Grace Nevil as he does. Come, Grace, no New York or Philadelphia airs here! Consider your uncle's interests with this capitalist, to say nothing of ours. Because you're a millionaire and have been accustomed to riches from your birth, don't turn up your nose at our unpampered appetites. Besides, Jack Somers is Rushbrook's particular friend, and he may think your criticisms unkind."

"But *is* Mr. Somers such a great friend of Mr. Rushbrook's?" asked Grace Nevil.

"Why, of course. Rushbrook consults him about all these things; gives him *carte blanche* to invite whom he

likes and order what he likes, and trusts his taste and judgment implicitly."

"Then this gathering is Mr. Somers's selection?"

"How preposterous you are, Grace. Of course not. Only Somers's *idea* of what is pleasing to Rushbrook, gotten up with a taste and discretion all his own. You know Somers is a gentleman, educated at West Point; travelled all over Europe—you might have met him there; and Rushbrook—well, you have only to see him to know what *he* is. Don't you understand?"

A slight seriousness; the same shadow that once before darkened the girl's charming face, gave way to a mischievous knitting of her brows as she said naïvely, "No."

CHAPTER III.

GRACE NEVIL had quite recovered her equanimity when the indispensable Mr. Somers, handsome, well-bred, and self-restrained, approached her later in the crowded drawing-room. Blended with his subdued personal admiration was a certain ostentation of respect—as of a tribute to a distinguished guest—that struck her. "I am to have the pleasure of taking you in, Miss Nevil," he said. "It's my one compensation for the dreadful responsibility just thrust upon me. Our host has been suddenly called away, and I am left to take his place."

Miss Nevil was slightly startled. Nevertheless, she smiled graciously. "From what I hear, this is no new function of yours; that is, if there really *is* a Mr. Rushbrook. I am inclined to think him a myth."

"You make me wish he were," retorted Somers gallantly; "but as I couldn't reign at all, except in his stead, I shall

look to you to lend your rightful grace to my borrowed dignity."

The more general announcement to the company was received with a few perfidious regrets from the more polite, but with only amused surprise by the majority. Indeed, many considered it "characteristic"—"so like Bob Rushbrook," and a few enthusiastic friends looked upon it as a crowning and intentional stroke of humour. It remained, however, for the gentleman from Siskyou to give the incident a subtlety that struck Miss Nevil's fancy. "It reminds me," he said in her hearing, "of ole Kernel Frisbee, of Robertson County, one of the purlitest men I ever struck. When he knew a fellow was very dry, he'd jest set the decanter afore him, and managed to be called outer the room on bus'ness. Now, Bob Rushbrook's about as white a man as that. He's jest the feller who, knowing you and me might feel kinder restrained about indulging our appetites afore him, kinder drops out easy, and leaves us alone." And she was impressed by an instinct that the speaker really felt the delicacy he spoke of, and that it left no sense of inferiority behind.

The dinner, served in a large, brilliantly lit saloon, that in floral decoration and gilded columns suggested an ingenious blending of a steamboat *table d'hôte* and "harvest home," was perfect in its *cuisine*, even if somewhat extravagant in its proportions.

"I should be glad to receive the salary that Rushbrook pays his *chef*, and still happier to know how to earn it as fairly," said Somers to his fair companion.

"But is his skill entirely appreciated here?" she asked.

"Perfectly," responded Somers. "Our friend from Siskyou over there appreciates that *pâte* which he cannot name as well as I do. Rushbrook himself is the only exception, yet I fancy that even *his* simplicity and regularity

in feeding is as much a matter of business with him as any defect in his earlier education. In his eyes, his *chef's* greatest qualification is his promptness and fertility. Have you noticed that ornament before you?" pointing to an elaborate confection. "It bears your initials, you see. It was conceived and executed since you arrived—rather, I should say, since it was known that you would honour us with your company. The greatest difficulty encountered was to find out what your initials were."

"And I suppose," mischievously added the young girl to her acknowledgments, "that the same fertile mind which conceived the design eventually provided the initials?"

"That is our secret," responded Somers, with affected gravity.

The wines were of characteristic expensiveness, and provoked the same general comment. Rushbrook seldom drank wine; Somers had selected it. But the barbaric opulence of the entertainment culminated in the Californian fruits, piled in pyramids on silver dishes, gorgeous and unreal in their size and painted beauty, and the two Divas smiled over a basket of grapes and peaches as outrageous in dimensions and glaring colour as any pasteboard banquet at which they had professionally assisted. As the courses succeeded each other, under the exaltation of wine, conversation became more general as regarded participation, but more local and private as regarded the subject, until Miss Nevil could no longer follow it. The interests of that one, the hopes of another, the claims of a third, in affairs that were otherwise uninteresting, were all discussed with singular youthfulness of trust that, alone to her, seemed remarkable. Not that she lacked entertainment from the conversation of her clever companion, whose confidences and criticisms were very pleasant to her; but she had a gentlewoman's instinct that he talked to her too much, and

more than was consistent with his duties as the general host. She looked around the table for her singular acquaintance of an hour before, but she had not seen him since. She would have spoken about him to Somers, but she had an instinctive idea that the latter would be anti-pathetic, in spite of the stranger's flattering commendation. So she found herself again following Somers's cynical but good-humoured description of the various guests—and, I fear, seeing with his eyes, listening with his ears, and occasionally participating in his superior attitude. The "fearful joy" she had found in the novelty of the situation and the originality of the actors seemed now quite right from this critical point of view. So she learned how the guest with the long hair was an unknown painter, to whom Rushbrook had given a commission for three hundred yards of painted canvas, to be cut up and framed as occasion and space required, in Rushbrook's new hotel in San Francisco; how the grey-bearded foreigner near him was an accomplished bibliophil who was furnishing Mr. Rushbrook's library from spoils of foreign collections, and had suffered unheard-of agonies from the millionaire's insisting upon a handsome uniform binding that should deprive certain precious but musty tomes of their crumbling, worm-eaten coverings; how the very gentle, clerical-looking stranger, mildest of a noisy, disputing crowd at the other table, was a notorious duellist and dead shot; how the only gentleman at the table who retained a flannel shirt and high boots was not a late-coming mountaineer, but a well-known English baronet on his travels; how the man who told a somewhat florid and emphatic anecdote was a popular Eastern clergyman; how the one querulous, discontented face in a laughing group was the famous humorist who had just convulsed it; and how a pale, handsome young fellow, who ate and drank sparingly and disregarded the coquettish advances of the

prettiest Diva with the cold abstraction of a student, was a notorious *roué* and gambler. But there was a sudden and unlooked for change of criticism and critic.

The festivity had reached that stage when the guests were more or less accessible to emotion, and more or less touched by the astounding fact that each other was enjoying himself. This phenomenon, which is apt to burst into song or dance among other races, is constrained to voice itself in an Anglo-Saxon gathering by some explanation, apology, or moral—known as an after-dinner speech. Thus it was that the gentleman from Siskyou, who had been from time to time casting glances at Somers and his fair companion at the head of the table, now rose to his feet, albeit unsteadily, pushed back his chair, and began—

“Pears to me, ladies and gentlemen, and fellow-pardners, that on an occasion like this suthin’ oughter be said of the man who got it up—whose money paid fer it, and who ain’t here to speak for himself, except by deputy. Yet you all know that’s Bob Rushbrook’s style—he ain’t here, because he’s full of some other plan or improvements—and it’s like him to start suthin’ of this kind, give it its aim and purpose, and then stand aside to let somebody else run it for him. There ain’t no man livin’ ez hes, so to speak, more fast horses ready saddled for riding, and more fast men ready spurred to ride ’em—whether to win his races or run his errands. There ain’t no man livin’ ez knows better how to make other men’s games his, or his game seem to be other men’s. And from Jack Somers smilin’ over there, ez knows where to get the best wine that Bob pays for, and knows how to run this yer show for Bob at Bob’s expense—we’re all contented. Ladies and gentlemen, we’re all contented. We stand, so to speak, on the cards he’s dealt us. What may be his little game, it ain’t for us to say; but whatever it is,

we're in it. Gentlemen and ladies, we'll drink Bob's health!"

There was a somewhat sensational pause, followed by good-natured laughter and applause, in which Somers joined; yet not without a certain constraint that did not escape the quick sympathy of the shocked and unsmiling Miss Nevil. It was with a feeling of relief that she caught the chaperoning eye of Mrs. Leyton, who was entreating her in the usual mysterious signal to the other ladies to rise and follow her. When she reached the drawing-room, a little behind the others, she was somewhat surprised to observe that the stranger whom she had missed during the evening was approaching her with Mrs. Leyton.

"Mr. Rushbrook returned sooner than he expected, but unfortunately, as he always retires early, he has only time to say 'good night' to you before he goes."

For an instant Grace Nevil was more angry than disconcerted. Then came the conviction that she was stupid not to have suspected the truth before. Who else would that brusque stranger develop into but this rude host? She bowed formally.

Mr. Rushbrook looked at her with the faintest smile on his handsome mouth. "Well, Miss Nevil, I hope Jack Somers satisfied your curiosity?"

With a sudden recollection of the Siskyou gentleman's speech, and a swift suspicion that in some way she had been made use of with the others by this forceful-looking man before her, she answered pertly—

"Yes; but there was a speech by a gentleman from Siskyou that struck me as being nearer to the purpose."

"That's so—I heard it as I came in," said Mr. Rushbrook calmly. "I don't know but you're right."

CHAPTER IV.

SIX months had passed. The villa of Mæcnas was closed at Los Osos Cañon, and the south-west trade winds were slanting the rains of the wet season against its shut windows and barred doors. Within that hollow, deserted shell its aspect—save for a single exception—was unchanged; the furniture and decorations preserved their eternal youth undimmed by time; the rigidly-arranged rooms, now closed to life and light, developed more than ever their resemblance to a furniture warehouse. The single exception was the room which Grace Nevil had rearranged for herself; and that, oddly enough, was stripped and bare—even to its paper and mouldings.

In other respects the sealed treasures of Rushbrook's villa, far from provoking any sentimentality, seemed only to give truth to the current rumour that it was merely waiting to be transformed into a gorgeous watering-place hotel under Rushbrook's direction; that, with its new ball-room changed into an elaborate dining-hall, it would undergo still further improvement, the inevitable end and object of all Rushbrook's enterprise, and that its former proprietor had already begun another villa whose magnificence should eclipse the last. There certainly appeared to be no limit to the millionaire's success in all that he personally undertook, or in his fortunate complicity with the enterprise and invention of others. His name was associated with the oldest and safest schemes, as well as the newest and boldest—with an equal guarantee of security. A few, it was true, looked doubtingly upon this "one man power," but could not refute the fact that others had largely benefited by association with him, and that he shared his profits with a royal hand. Some objected on higher grounds to his brutalising the influence

of wealth by his material and extravagantly practical processes, instead of the gentler suggestions of education and personal example, and were impelled to point out the fact that he and his patronage were vulgar. It was felt, however, by those who received his benefits, that a proper sense of this inferiority was all that ethics demanded of them. One could still accept Rushbrook's barbaric gifts by humorously recognising the fact that he didn't know any better, and that it pleased him, as long as they resented any higher pretensions.

The rain-beaten windows of Rushbrook's town house, however, were cheerfully lit that December evening. Mr. Rushbrook seldom dined alone; in fact, it was popularly alleged that very often the unfinished business of the day was concluded over his bountiful and perfect board. He was dressing as James entered the room.

"Mr. Leyton is in your study, sir; he will stay to dinner."

"All right."

"I think, sir," added James, with respectful suggestiveness, "he wants to talk. At least, sir, he asked me if you would likely come downstairs before your company arrived."

"Ah! Well, tell the others I'm dining on *business*, and set dinner for two in the blue room."

"Yes, sir."

Meanwhile Mr. Leyton—a man of Rushbrook's age, but not so fresh and vigorous-looking—had thrown himself in a chair beside the study fire, after a glance around the handsome and familiar room. For the house had belonged to a brother millionaire; it had changed hands with certain shares of "Water Front,"—as some of Rushbrook's dealings had the true barbaric absence of money detail—and was elegantly and tastefully furnished. The cuckoo had, however, already laid a few characteristic eggs in this adopted nest, and a white marble statue of a nude and ill-fed Virtue,

sent over by Rushbrook's Paris agent and unpacked that morning, stood in one corner, and materially brought down the temperature. A Japanese praying-throne of pure ivory, and, above it, a few yards of improper, coloured exposure by an old master, equalised each other.

"And what is all this affair about the dinner?" suddenly asked a tartly-pitched female voice with a foreign accent.

Mr. Leyton turned quickly, and was just conscious of a faint shriek, the rustle of a skirt, and the swift vanishing of a woman's figure from the doorway. Mr. Leyton turned red. Rushbrook lived *en garçon*, with feminine possibilities; Leyton was a married man and a deacon. The incident which, to a man of the world, would have brought only a smile, fired the inexperienced Leyton with those exaggerated ideas and intense credulity regarding vice common to some very good men. He walked on tip-toe to the door, and peered into the passage. At that moment Rushbrook entered from the opposite door of the room.

"Well," said Rushbrook, with his usual practical directness, "what do you think of her?"

Leyton, still flushed, and with eyebrows slightly knit, said awkwardly that he had scarcely seen her.

"She cost me already ten thousand dollars, and I suppose I'll have to eventually fix up a separate room for her somewhere," continued Rushbrook.

"I should certainly advise it," said Leyton quickly; "for really, Rushbrook, you know that something is due to the respectable people who come here, and any of them are likely to see——"

"Ah!" interrupted Rushbrook seriously, "you think she hasn't got on clothes enough. Why, look here, old man—she's one of the Virtues, and that's the rig in which they always travel. She's a 'Temperance' or a 'Charity' or a 'Resignation,' or something of that kind. You'll find

her name there in French somewhere at the foot of the marble."

Leyton saw his mistake, but felt—as others sometimes felt—a doubt whether this smileless man was not inwardly laughing at him. He replied, with a keen rapid glance at his host—

"I was referring to some woman who stood in that doorway just now, and addressed me rather familiarly, thinking it was you."

"Oh, the Signora," said Rushbrook, with undisturbed directness; "well, you saw her at Los Osos last summer. Likely she *did* think you were me."

The cool ignoring of any ulterior thought in Leyton's objection forced the guest to be equally practical in his reply.

"Yes, but the fact is that Miss Nevil had talked of coming here with me this evening to see you on her own affairs, and it wouldn't have been exactly the thing for her to meet that woman."

"She wouldn't," said Rushbrook promptly; "nor would *you*, if you had gone into the parlour as Miss Nevil would have done. But look here! If that's the reason why you didn't bring her, send for her at once; my coachman can take a card from you; the brougham's all ready to fetch her, and there you are. She'll see only you and me." He was already moving towards the bell, when Leyton stopped him.

"No matter now. I can tell you her business, I fancy; and in fact I came here to speak of it, quite independently of her."

"That won't do, Leyton," interrupted Rushbrook, with crisp decision; "one or the other interview is unnecessary; it wastes time, and isn't business. Better have her present, even if she don't say a word."

"Yes, but not in this matter," responded Leyton. "It's

about Somers. You know he's been very attentive to her ever since her uncle left her here to recruit her health, and I think she fancies him. Well, although she's independent and her own mistress, as you know, Mrs. Leyton and I are somewhat responsible for her acquaintance with Somers—and for that matter so are you—and as my wife thinks it means a marriage, we ought to know something more positive about Somers's prospects. Now, all we really know is that he is a great friend of yours; that you trust a great deal to him; that he manages your social affairs; that you treat him as a son or nephew, and it's generally believed that he's as good as provided for by you—eh? Did you speak?”

“No,” said Rushbrook, quietly regarding the statue, as if taking its measurement for a suitable apartment for it. “Go on.”

“Well,” said Leyton a little impatiently, “that's the belief everybody has, and you've not contradicted it. And on that we've taken the responsibility of not interfering with Somers's attentions.”

“Well?” said Rushbrook interrogatively.

“Well,” replied Leyton emphatically, “you see I must ask you positively if you *have* done anything, or are you going to do anything for him?”

“Well?” replied Rushbrook, with exasperating coolness, “what do you call this marriage?”

“I don't understand you,” said Leyton.

“Look here, Leyton,” said Rushbrook, suddenly and abruptly facing him; “Jack Somers has brains, knowledge of society, tact, accomplishments, and good looks. That's *his* capital, as much as mine is money. I employ him; that's his advertisement, recommendation, and credit. Now, on the strength of this, as you say, Miss Nevil is willing to invest in him; I don't see what more can be done.”

"But if her uncle don't think it enough?"

"She's independent, and has money for both."

"But if she thinks she's been deceived, and changes her mind?"

"Leyton, you don't know Miss Nevil. Whatever that girl undertakes she's weighed fully and goes through with. If she's trusted him enough to marry him, money won't stop her; if she thinks she's been deceived, *you'll* never know it."

The enthusiasm and conviction were so unlike Rushbrook's usual cynical toleration of the sex that Leyton stared at him.

"That's odd," he returned. "That's what she says of you."

"Of *me*; you mean Somers?"

"No; of *you*. Come, Rushbrook, don't pretend you don't know that Miss Nevil is a great partisan of yours, swears by you, says you're misunderstood by people, and, what's infernally odd in a woman who don't belong to the class you fancy, don't talk of your habits. That's why she wants to consult you about Somers, I suppose, and that's why, knowing you might influence her, I came here first to warn you."

"And I've told you that whatever I might say or do wouldn't influence her. So we'll drop the subject."

"Not yet; for you're bound to see Miss Nevil sooner or later. Now, if she knows that you've done nothing for this man, your friend and her lover, won't she be justified in thinking that you have a reason for it?"

"Yes. I should give it."

"What reason?"

"That I knew she'd be more contented to have him speculate with *her* money than mine."

"Then you think that he isn't a business man?"

"I think that she thinks so, or she wouldn't marry him; it's part of the attraction. But come; James has been for five minutes discreetly waiting outside the door to tell us dinner is ready and the coast clear of all other company. But look here," he said, suddenly stopping, with his arm in Leyton's; "you're through your talk, I suppose; perhaps you'd rather we'd dine with the Signora and the others than alone?"

For an instant Leyton thrilled with the fascination of what he firmly believed was a guilty temptation. Rushbrook, perceiving his hesitation, added—

"By the way, Somers is of the party, and one or two others you know."

Mr. Leyton opened his eyes widely at this; either the temptation had passed, or the idea of being seen in doubtful company by a younger man was distasteful, for he hurriedly disclaimed any preference. "But," he added, with half-significant politeness, "perhaps I'm keeping *you* from them?"

"It makes not the slightest difference to me," calmly returned Rushbrook, with such evident truthfulness that Leyton was both convinced and chagrined.

Preceded by the grave and ubiquitous James, they crossed the large hall and entered through a smaller passage a charming apartment hung with blue damask, which might have been a boudoir, study, or small reception room, yet had the air of never having been anything continuously. It would seem that Rushbrook's habit of "camping out" in different parts of his mansion obtained here as at Los Osos, and with the exception of a small closet which contained his Spartan bed, the rooms were used separately or in suites as occasion or his friends required. It is recorded that an Eastern guest, newly arrived with letters to Rushbrook, after a tedious journey, expressed himself highly pleased with this same

blue room, in which he had sumptuously dined with his host, and subsequently fell asleep in his chair. Without disturbing his guest, Rushbrook had the table removed, a bed, washstand, and bureau brought in, the sleeping man delicately laid upon the former, and left to awaken to an Arabian Nights' realisation of his wish.

CHAPTER V.

JAMES had barely disposed of his master and Mr. Leyton, and left them to the ministrations of two of his underlings, before he was confronted with one of those difficult problems that it was part of his functions to solve. The porter informed him that a young lady had just driven up in a carriage ostensibly to see Mr. Rushbrook, and James, descending to the outer vestibule, found himself face to face with Miss Grace Nevil. Happily, that young lady, with her usual tact, spared him some embarrassment.

"Oh! James," she said sweetly, "do you think that I could see Mr. Rushbrook for a few moments *if I waited for the opportunity?* You understand, I don't wish to disturb him or his company by being regularly announced."

The young girl's practical intelligence appeared to increase the usual respect which James had always shown her. "I understand, miss." He thought for a moment, and said "Would you mind, then, following me where you could wait quietly and alone?" As she quickly assented, he preceded her up the staircase, past the study and drawing-room, which he did not enter, and stopped before a small door at the end of the passage. Then, handing her a key which he took from his pocket, he said, "This is the only room in the house that is strictly reserved for Mr. Rushbrook, and even he rarely uses it. You can wait here without anybody

knowing it until I can communicate with him and bring you to his study unobserved. And," he hesitated, "if you wouldn't mind locking the door when you are in, miss, you would be more secure, and I will knock when I come for you."

Grace Nevil smiled at the man's prudence, and entered the room. But to her great surprise, she had scarcely shut the door when she was instantly struck with a singular memory which the apartment recalled. It was exactly like the room she had altered in Rushbrook's villa at Los Osos! More than that, on close examination it proved to be the very same furniture, arranged as she remembered to have arranged it, even to the flowers and grasses, now, alas! faded and withered on the walls. There could be no mistake. There was the open ebony *escritoire* with the satin blotter open, and its leaves still bearing the marks of her own handwriting. So complete to her mind was the idea of her own tenancy in this bachelor's mansion, that she looked around with a half-indignant alarm for the photograph or portrait of herself that might further indicate it. But there was no other exposition. The only thing that had been added was a gilt legend on the satin case of the blotter—"Los Osos, August 20, 186—," the day she had occupied the room.

She was pleased, astonished, but more than all, disturbed. The only man who might claim a right to this figurative possession of her tastes and habits was the one whom she had quietly, reflectively, and understandingly half accepted as her lover, and on whose account she had come to consult Rushbrook. But Somers was not a sentimentalist; in fact, as a young girl forced by her independent position to somewhat critically scrutinise masculine weaknesses, this had always been a point in his favour; yet even if he had joined with his friend Rushbrook to perpetuate the memory of their first acquaintanceship, his taste merely would not have

selected a *chambre de garçon* in Mr. Rushbrook's home for its exhibition. Her conception of the opposite characters of the two men was singularly distinct and real, and this momentary confusion of them was disagreeable to her woman's sense. But at this moment James came to release her and conduct her to Rushbrook's study, where he would join her at once. Everything had been arranged as she had wished.

Even a more practical man than Rushbrook might have lingered over the picture of the tall, graceful figure of Miss Nevil, quietly enthroned in a large arm-chair by the fire, her scarlet satin-lined cloak thrown over its back, and her chin resting on her hand. But the millionaire walked directly towards her with his usual frankness of conscious but restrained power, and she felt, as she always did, perfectly at her ease in his presence. Even as she took his outstretched hand, its straightforward grasp seemed to endow her with its own confidence.

"You'll excuse my coming here so abruptly," she smiled, "but I wanted to get before Mr. Leyton, who, I believe, wishes to see you on the same business as myself."

"He is here already, and dining with me," said Rushbrook.

"Ah! does he know I am here?" asked the girl quietly.

"No; as he said you had thought of coming with him and didn't, I presumed you didn't care to have him know you had come alone."

"Not exactly that, Mr. Rushbrook," she said, fixing her beautiful eyes on him in bright and trustful confidence; "but I happen to have a fuller knowledge of this business than he has, and yet, as it is not altogether my own secret, I was not permitted to divulge it to him. Nor would I tell it to you, only I cannot bear that you should think that I had anything to do with this wretched inquisition into

Mr. Somers's prospects. Knowing as well as you do how perfectly independent I am, you would think it strange, wouldn't you? But you would think it still more surprising when you found out that I and my uncle already know how liberally and generously you had provided for Mr. Somers in the future."

"How I had provided for Mr. Somers in the future?" repeated Mr. Rushbrook, looking at the fire, "eh?"

"Yes," said the young girl indifferently; "how you were to put him in to succeed you in the Water Front Trust, and all that. He told it to me and my uncle at the outset of our acquaintance, confidentially, of course, and I dare say with an honourable delicacy that was like him, but—I suppose now you will think me foolish—all the while I'd rather he had not."

"You'd rather he had not," repeated Mr. Rushbrook slowly.

"Yes," continued Grace, leaning forward with her rounded elbows on her knees, and her slim, arched feet on the fender. "Now you are going to laugh at me, Mr. Rushbrook, but all this seemed to me to spoil any spontaneous feeling I might have towards him, and limit my independence in a thing that should be a matter of free will alone. It seemed too much like a business proposition! There, my kind friend!" she added, looking up and trying to read his face with a half girlish pout, followed, however, by a maturer sigh, "I'm bothering you with a woman's foolishness instead of talking business. And—" another sigh—"I suppose it *is* business, for my uncle, who has, it seems, bought into this Trust on these possible contingencies, has perhaps been asking questions of Mr. Leyton. But I don't want you to think that I approve of them, or advise your answering them. But you are not listening."

"I had forgotten something," said Rushbrook, with an

odd pre-occupation. "Excuse me a moment—I will return at once."

He left the room quite as abstractedly, and when he reached the passage he apparently could not remember what he had forgotten, as he walked deliberately to the end window, where, with his arms folded behind his back, he remained looking out into the street. A passer-by, glancing up, might have said he had seen the pale, stern ghost of Mr. Rushbrook, framed like a stony portrait in the window. But he presently turned away and re-entered the room, going up to Grace, who was still sitting by the fire, in his usual strong and direct fashion.

"Well! Now let me see what you want. I think this would do."

He took a seat at his open desk and rapidly wrote a few lines.

"There," he continued; "when you write to your uncle, enclose that."

Grace took it and read—

"DEAR MISS NEVIL,—Pray assure your uncle from me that I am quite ready to guarantee, in any form that he may require, the undertaking represented to him by Mr. John Somers.—Yours very truly,
ROBERT RUSHBROOK."

A quick flush mounted to the young girl's cheeks. "But this is a *security*, Mr. Rushbrook," she said proudly, handing him back the paper, "and my uncle does not require that. Nor shall I insult him or you by sending it."

"It is *business*, Miss Nevil," said Rushbrook gravely. He stopped, and fixed his eyes upon her animated face and sparkling eyes. "You can send it to him or not, as you like. But," a rare smile came to his handsome mouth, "as this is a letter to *you*, you must not insult *me* by not accepting it."

Replying to his smile rather than the words that accompanied it, Miss Nevil smiled too. Nevertheless she was uneasy and disturbed. The interview, whatever she might have vaguely expected from it, had resolved itself simply into a business endorsement of her lover, which she had not sought, and which gave her no satisfaction. Yet there was the same potent and indefinitely protecting presence before her which she had sought, but whose omniscience and whose help she seemed to have lost the spell and courage to put to the test. He relieved her in his abrupt but not unkindly fashion. "Well, when is it to be?"

"It?"

"Your marriage."

"Oh, not for some time. There's no hurry."

It might have struck the practical Mr. Rushbrook that, even considered as a desirable business affair, the prospective completion of this contract provoked neither frank satisfaction nor conventional dissimulation on the part of the young lady, for he regarded her calm but slightly wearied expression fixedly. But he only said, "Then I shall say nothing of this interview to Mr. Leyton?"

"As you please. It really matters little. Indeed, I suppose I was rather foolish in coming at all, and wasting your valuable time for nothing."

She had risen, as if taking his last question in the significance of a parting suggestion, and was straightening her tall figure preparatory to putting on her cloak. As she reached it he stepped forward and lifted it from the chair to assist her. The act was so unprecedented, as Mr. Rushbrook never indulged in those minor masculine courtesies, that she was momentarily as confused as a younger girl at the gallantry of a younger man. In their previous friendship he had seldom drawn near her except to shake her

hand—a circumstance that had always recurred to her when his free and familiar life had been the subject of gossip. But she now had a more frightened consciousness that her nerves were strangely responding to his powerful propinquity, and she involuntarily contracted her pretty shoulders as he gently laid the cloak upon them. Yet even when the act was completed, she had a superstitious instinct that the significance of this rare courtesy was that it was final, and that he had helped her to interpose something that shut him out from her for ever.

She was turning away with a heightened colour, when the sound of light hurried footsteps and the rustle of a woman's dress was heard in the hall. A swift recollection of her companion's infelicitous reputation now returned to her, and Grace Nevil, with a slight stiffening of her whole frame, became coldly herself again. Mr. Rushbrook betrayed neither surprise nor agitation. Begging her to wait a moment until he could arrange for her to pass to her carriage unnoticed, he left the room.

Yet it seemed that the cause of the disturbance was unsuspected by Mr. Rushbrook. Mr. Leyton, although left to the consolation of cigars and liquors in the blue room, had become slightly weary of his companion's prolonged absence. Satisfied in his mind that Rushbrook had joined the gayer party, and that he was even now paying gallant court to the Signora, he became again curious and uneasy. At last the unmistakable sound of whispering voices in the passage got the better of his sense of courtesy as a guest, and he rose from his seat and slightly opened the door. As he did so the figures of a man and woman, conversing in earnest whispers, passed the opening. The man's arm was round the woman's waist; the woman was—as he had suspected—the one who had stood in the doorway, the Signora—but—the man was *not* Rushbrook. Mr. Leyton

drew back this time in unaffected horror. It was none other than Jack Somers !

Some warning instinct must at that moment have struck the woman, for with a stifled cry she disengaged herself from Somers's arm, and dashed rapidly down the hall. Somers, evidently unaware of the cause, stood irresolute for a moment, and then more silently but swiftly disappeared into a side corridor as if to intercept her. It was the rapid passage of the Signora that had attracted the attention of Grace and Rushbrook in the study, and it was the moment after it that Mr. Rushbrook left.

CHAPTER VI.

VAGUELY uneasy and still perplexed with her previous agitation, as Mr. Rushbrook closed the door behind him, Grace, following some feminine instinct rather than any definite reason, walked to the door and placed her hand upon the lock to prevent any intrusion until he returned. Her caution seemed to be justified a moment later, for a heavier but stealthier footstep halted outside. The handle of the door was turned, but she resisted it with the fullest strength of her small hand until a voice, which startled her, called in a hurried whisper—

“Open quick, ’tis I.”

She stepped back quickly, flung the door open, and beheld Somers on the threshold !

The astonishment, agitation, and above all, the awkward confusion of this usually self-possessed and ready man, was so unlike him, and withal so painful, that Grace hurried to put an end to it, and for an instant forgot her own surprise at seeing him. She smiled assuringly, and extended her hand.

"Grace—Miss Nevil—I beg your pardon—I didn't imagine"—he began, with a forced laugh. "I mean, of course—I cannot—but——" He stopped, and then assuming a peculiar expression, said, "But what are *you* doing here?"

At any other moment the girl would have resented the tone, which was as new to her as his previous agitation, but in her present self-consciousness her situation seemed to require some explanation. "I came here," she said, "to see Mr. Rushbrook on business. Your business—*our* business," she added, with a charming smile, using for the first time the pronoun that seemed to indicate their unity and interest, and yet fully aware of a vague insincerity in doing so.

"Our *business*?" he repeated, ignoring her gentler meaning with a changed emphasis and a look of suspicion.

"Yes," said Grace, a little impatiently. "Mr. Leyton thought he ought to write to my uncle something positive as to your prospects with Mr. Rushbrook, and——"

"You came here to inquire?" said the young man sharply.

"I came here to stop any inquiry," said Grace indignantly. "I came here to say *I* was satisfied with what you had confided to me of Mr. Rushbrook's generosity, and that was enough!"

"With what *I* had confided to you? You dared say that?"

Grace stopped and instantly faced him. But any indignation she might have felt at his speech and manner was swallowed up in the revulsion and horror that overtook her with the sudden revelation she saw in his white and frightened face. Leyton's strange inquiry, Rushbrook's cold composure and scornful acceptance of her own credulousness, came to her in a flash of shameful intelligence. Somers had lied!

The insufferable meanness of it! A lie, whose very uselessness and ignobility had defeated its purpose—a lie that implied the basest suspicion of her own independence and truthfulness—such a lie now stood out as plainly before her as his guilty face.

“Forgive my speaking so rudely,” he said, with a forced smile and attempt to recover his self-control; “but you have ruined me unless you deny that I told you anything. It was a joke—an extravagance that I had forgotten; at least it was a confidence between you and me that you have foolishly violated. Say that you misunderstood me—that it was a fancy of your own. Say anything—he trusts you—he’ll believe anything you say.”

“He *has* believed me,” said Grace almost fiercely, turning upon him with the paper that Rushbrook had given her in her outstretched hand. “Read that!”

He read it. Had he blushed, had he stammered, had he even kept up his former frantic and pitiable attitude, she might at that supreme moment have forgiven him. But to her astonishment his face changed, his handsome brow cleared, his careless, happy smile returned, his graceful confidence came back—he stood before her the elegant, courtly, and accomplished gentleman she had known. He returned her the paper, and advancing with extended hand, said triumphantly—

“Superb! Splendid! No one but a woman could think of that! And only one woman achieve it. You have tricked the great Rushbrook. You are indeed worthy of being a financier’s wife!”

“No,” she said passionately, tearing up the paper and throwing it at his feet; “not as *you* understand it—and never *yours*! You have debased and polluted everything connected with it as you would have debased and polluted *me*. Out of my presence that you are insulting—out of the

room of the man whose magnanimity you cannot understand!"

The destruction of the guarantee apparently stung him more than the words that accompanied it. He did not relapse again into his former shamefaced terror, but as a malignant glitter came into his eyes, he regained his coolness.

"It may not be so difficult for others to understand, Miss Nevil," he said, with polished insolence; "and as Bob Rushbrook's generosity to pretty women is already a matter of suspicion, perhaps you are wise to destroy that record of it."

"Coward!" said Grace; "stand aside, and let me pass!" She swept by him to the door. But it opened upon Rushbrook's re-entrance. He stood for an instant glancing at the pair, and then on the fragments of the paper that strewed the floor. Then, still holding the door in his hand, he said quietly—

"One moment before you go, Miss Nevil. If this is the result of any misunderstanding as to the presence of another woman here, in company with Mr. Somers, it is only fair to him to say that that woman is here as a friend of *mine*, not of his, and I alone am responsible."

Grace halted, and turned the cold steel of her proud eyes on the two men. As they rested on Rushbrook they quivered slightly. "I can already bear witness," she said coldly, "to the generosity of Mr. Rushbrook in a matter which then touched me. But there certainly is no necessity for him to show it now in a matter in which I have not the slightest concern."

As she swept out of the room, and was received in the respectable shadow of the waiting James, Rushbrook turned to Somers.

"And *I'm* afraid it won't do—for Leyton saw you," he

said curtly. "Now then, shut that door, for you and I, Jack Somers, have a word to say to each other."

What that word was, and how it was said and received, is not a part of this record. But it is told that it was the beginning of that mighty Iliad, still remembered of men, which shook the financial camps of San Francisco, and divided them into bitter contending parties. For when it became known the next day that Somers had suddenly abandoned Rushbrook, and carried over to a powerful foreign capitalist the secret methods, and even, it was believed, the *luck* of his late employer, it was certain that there would be war to the knife, and that it was no longer a struggle of rival enterprise, but of vindictive men.

CHAPTER VII.

FOR a year the battle between the Somers faction and the giant but solitary Rushbrook raged fiercely, with varying success. I grieve to say that the *protégés* and parasites of Mæcenas deserted him in a body; nay, they openly alleged that it was the true artistic nature and refinement of Somers that had always attracted them, and that a man like Rushbrook, who bought pictures by the yard—equally of the unknown struggling artist and the famous masters—was no true patron of Art. Rushbrook made no attempt to recover his lost prestige, and once, when squeezed into a tight "corner," and forced to realise on his treasures, he put them up at auction and the people called them "daubs," their rage knew no bounds. It was then that an unfettered press discovered that Rushbrook never was a Mæcenas at all, grimly deprecated his assumption of that title, and even doubted if he were truly a millionaire. It was at this time that a few stood by him—notably, the mill inventor

from Siskyou, grown plethoric with success, but eventually ground between the upper and nether millstones of the Somers and Rushbrook party. Miss Nevil had returned to the Atlantic States with Mrs. Leyton. While rumours had played freely with the relations of Somers and the Signora as the possible cause of the rupture between him and Rushbrook, no mention had ever been made of the name of Miss Nevil.

It was raining heavily one afternoon, when Mr. Rushbrook drove from his office to his San Francisco house. The fierce struggle in which he was engaged left him little time for hospitality, and for the last two weeks his house had been comparatively deserted. He passed through the empty rooms, changed in little except the absence of some valuable monstrosities which had gone to replenish his capital.

When he reached his bedroom, he paused a moment at the open door.

"James!"

"Yes, sir," said James, appearing out of the shadow.

"What are you waiting for?"

"I thought you might be wanting something, sir."

"You were waiting there this morning; you were in the ante-room of my study while I was writing. You were outside the blue room while I sat at breakfast. You were at my elbow in the drawing-room late last night. Now, James," continued Mr. Rushbrook, with his usual grave directness, "I don't intend to commit suicide; I can't afford it, so keep your time and your rest for yourself—you want it—that's a good fellow."

"Yes, sir."

"James!"

"Yes, sir."

Rushbrook extended his hand. There was that faint rare smile on his handsome mouth, for which James would at

any time have laid down his life. But he only silently grasped his master's hand, and the two men remained looking into each other's eyes without a word. Then Mr. Rushbrook entered his room, lay down and went to sleep, and James vanished in the shadow.

At the end of an hour Mr. Rushbrook awoke refreshed, and even James, who came to call him, appeared to have brightened in the interval. "I have ordered a fire, sir, in the reserved room, the one fitted up from Los Osos, as your study has had no chance of being cleaned these two weeks. It will be a change for you, sir. I hope you'll excuse my not waking you to consult you about it."

Rushbrook remained so silent that James, fancying he had not heard him, was about to repeat himself when his master said quickly, "Very well; come for me there when dinner is ready," and entered the passage leading to the room. James did not follow him, and when Mr. Rushbrook, opening the door, started back with an exclamation, no one but the inmate heard the word that rose to his lips.

For there, seated before the glow of the blazing fire, was Miss Grace Nevil. She had evidently just arrived, for her mantle was barely loosened around her neck, and upon the fringe of brown hair between her bonnet and her broad, low forehead a few drops of rain still sparkled. As she lifted her long lashes quickly towards the door, it seemed as if they too had caught a little of that moisture. Rushbrook moved impatiently forward, and then stopped. Grace rose unhesitatingly to her feet and met him half way with frankly outstretched hands. "First of all," she said, with a half-nervous laugh, "don't scold James; it's all my fault; I forbade him to announce me, lest you should drive me away, for I heard that during this excitement you came here for rest, and saw no one. Even the intrusion into this room is all my own. I confess now that I saw it the last night

I was here ; I was anxious to know if it was unchanged, and made James bring me here. I did not understand it then. I do now—and—thank you.”

Her face must have shown that she was conscious that he was still holding her hand, for he suddenly released it. With a heightened colour and a half-girlish *naïveté*, that was the more charming for its contrast with her tall figure and air of thoroughbred repose, she turned back to her chair and lightly motioned him to take the one before her. “I am here on *business* ; otherwise I should not have dared to look in upon you at all.”

She stopped, drew off her gloves with a provoking deliberation, which was none the less fascinating that it implied a demure consciousness of inducing some impatience in the breast of her companion, stretched them out carefully by the fingers, laid them down neatly on the table, placed her elbows on her knees, slightly clasped her hands together, and bending forward, lifted her honest handsome eyes to the man before her.

“Mr. Rushbrook, I have got between four and five hundred thousand dollars that I have no use for ; I can control securities which can be converted, if necessary, into a hundred thousand more in ten days. I am free and my own mistress. It is generally considered that I know what I am about—you admitted as much when I was your pupil. I have come here to place this sum in your hands, at your free disposal. You know why and for what purpose.”

“But what do you know of my affairs?” asked Rushbrook quickly.

“Everything ; and I know *you*, which is better. Call it an investment if you like—for I know you will succeed—and let me share your profits. Call it—if you please—restitution, for I am the miserable cause of your rupture with that man. Or call it revenge if you like,” she said,

with a faint smile, "and let me fight at your side against our common enemy! Please, Mr. Rushbrook, don't deny me this. I have come three thousand miles for it; I could have sent it to you—or written—but I feared you would not understand it. You are smiling—you will take it?"

"I cannot," said Rushbrook gravely.

"Then you force me to go into the Stock Market myself and fight for you, and, unaided by *your* genius, perhaps lose it without benefiting you."

Rushbrook did not reply.

"At least, then, tell me why you 'cannot.'"

Rushbrook rose, and looking into her face, said quietly with his old directness—

"Because I love you, Miss Nevil."

A sudden instinct to rise and move away, a greater one to remain and hear him speak again, and a still greater one to keep back the blood that she felt was returning all too quickly to her cheek after the first shock, kept her silent. But she dropped her eyes.

"I loved you ever since I first saw you at Los Osos," he went on quickly; "I said to myself even then, that if there was a woman that would fill my life and make me what she wished me to be, it was you. I even fancied that day that you understood me better than any woman, or even any man, that I had ever met before. I loved you through all that miserable business with that man, even when my failure to make you happy with another brought me no nearer to you. I have loved you always. I shall love you always. I love you more for this foolish kindness that brings *you* beneath my roof once more, and gives me a chance to speak my heart to you, if only once and for the last time, than all the fortune that you could put at my disposal. But I could not accept what you would offer me from any woman who was not my wife—and I could not

marry any woman that did not love me. I am perhaps past the age when I could inspire a young girl's affection, but I have not reached the age when I would accept anything less." He stopped abruptly. Grace did not look up. There was a tear glistening upon her long eyelashes, albeit a faint smile played upon her lips.

"Do you call this business, Mr. Rushbrook?" she said softly.

"Business?"

"To assume proposal declined before it has been offered."

"Grace—my darling—tell me—is it possible?"

It was too late for her to rise now, as his hands held both hers, and his handsome mouth was smiling level with her own. So it really seemed to a dispassionate spectator that it *was* possible, and before she had left the room it even appeared to be the most probable thing in the world.

The union of Grace Nevil and Robert Rushbrook was recorded by local history as the crown to his victory over the Ring. But only he and his wife knew that it was the cause.

Colonel Starbottle's Client.

CHAPTER I.

IT may be remembered that it was the habit of that gallant "war-horse" of the Calaveras democracy, Colonel Starbottle, at the close of a political campaign, to return to his original profession of the Law. Perhaps it could not be called a peaceful retirement. The same fiery-tongued eloquence and full-breasted chivalry which had in turns thrilled and overawed freemen at the polls were no less fervid and embattled before a jury. Yet the Colonel was counsel for two or three pastoral Ditch companies and certain bucolic corporations, and although he managed to import into the simplest question of contract more or less abuse of opposing counsel, and occasionally mingled precedents of law with antecedents of his adversary, his legal victories were seldom complicated by bloodshed. He was only once shot at by a free-handed judge, and twice assaulted by an over-sensitive litigant. Nevertheless it was thought merely prudent, while preparing the papers in the well-known case of "The Arcadian Shepherds' Association of Tuolumne *versus* The Kedron Vine and Fig Tree Growers of Calaveras," that the Colonel should seek with a shot-gun the seclusion of his partner's law office in the sylvan outskirts of Rough and Ready for that complete rest and serious pre-occupation which Marysville could not afford.

It was an exceptionally hot day. The painted shingles

of the plain, wooden, one-storied building in which the Colonel sat were warped and blistering in the direct rays of the fierce untempered sun. The tin sign bearing the dazzling legend, "Starbottle and Bung-starter, Attorneys and Counsellors," glowed with an insufferable light ; the two pine-trees still left in the clearing around the house, ineffective as shade, seemed only to have absorbed the day-long heat through every scorched and crisp twig and fibre, to radiate it again with the pungent smell of a slowly smouldering fire ; the air was motionless yet vibrating in the sunlight ; on distant shallows the half-dried river was flashing and intolerable.

Seated in a wooden armchair before a table covered with books and papers, yet with that apparently haughty attitude towards it affected by gentlemen of abdominal fulness, Colonel Starbottle supported himself with one hand grasping the arm of his chair and the other vigorously plying a huge palm-leaf fan. He was perspiring freely. He had taken off his characteristic blue frock-coat, waistcoat, cravat, and collar, and, stripped only to his ruffled shirt and white drill trousers, presented the appearance from the opposite side of the table of having hastily risen to work in his nightgown. A glass with a thin sediment of sugar and lemon-peel remaining in it stood near his elbow. Suddenly a black shadow fell on the staring, uncarpeted hall. It was that of a stranger who had just entered from the noiseless dust of the deserted road. The Colonel cast a rapid glance at his sword-cane, which lay on the table.

But the stranger, although sallow and morose-looking, was evidently of pacific intent. He paused on the threshold in a kind of surly embarrassment.

"I reckon this is Colonel Starbottle," he said at last, glancing gloomily round him, as if the interview was not entirely of his own seeking. "Well, I've seen you often

enough, though you don't know me. My name's Jo Corbin. I guess," he added, still discontentedly, "I have to consult you about something."

"Corbin?" repeated the Colonel in his jauntiest manner. "Ah. Any relation to old Maje Corbin of Nashville, sir?"

"No," said the stranger briefly. "I'm from Shelbyville."

"The Major," continued the Colonel, half closing his eyes, as if to follow the Major into the dreamy past, "the old Major, sir, a matter of five or six years ago, was one of my most intimate political friends—in fact, sir, my most intimate friend. Take a chyar!"

But the stranger had already taken one, and during the Colonel's reminiscence had leaned forward with his eyes on the ground, discontentedly swinging his soft hat between his legs. "Did you know Tom Frisbee, of Yolo?" he asked abruptly.

"Er—no."

"Nor even heard anything about Frisbee, nor what happened to him?" continued the man, with aggrieved melancholy.

In point of fact the Colonel did not think that he had.

"Nor anything about his being killed over at Fresno?" said the stranger, with a desponding implication that the interview after all was a failure.

"If, er—if you could, er—give me a hint or two," suggested the Colonel blandly.

"There wasn't much," said the stranger, "if you don't remember." He paused, then, rising, he gloomily dragged his chair slowly beside the table, and taking up a paper-weight, examined it with heavy dissatisfaction. "You see," he went on slowly, "I killed him—it was a quo'll. He was my pardner, but I reckon he must have drove me hard. Yes, sir," he added, with aggrieved reflection, "I reckon he drove me hard."

The Colonel smiled courteously, slightly expanding his chest under the homicidal relation, as if, having taken it in and made it a part of himself, he was ready, if necessary, to become personally responsible for it. Then lifting his empty glass to the light, he looked at it with half-closed eyes, in polite imitation of his companion's examination of the paper-weight, and set it down again. A casual spectator from the window might have imagined that the two were engaged in an amicable inventory of the furniture.

"And the—er—actual circumstances?" asked the Colonel.

"Oh, it was a fair enough fight. *They'll* tell you that. And so would *he*, I reckon—if he could. He was ugly and bedevlin—but I didn't care to quo'll and give him the go-by all the time. He kept on, followed me out of the shanty, drew, and fired twice. I"—he stopped and regarded his hat a moment as if it was a corroborating witness—"I—I closed with him—I had to—it was my only chance, and that ended it—and with his own revolver. I never drew mine."

"I see," said the Colonel, nodding; "clearly justifiable and honourable as regards the Code. And you wish me to defend you?"

The stranger's gloomy expression of astonishment now turned to blank hopelessness.

"I knew you didn't understand," he said despairingly. "Why, all *that* was *two years ago*. It's all settled and done and gone. The jury found for me at the inquest. It ain't *that* I want to see you about. It's something arising out of it."

"Ah," said the Colonel affably—"a vendetta, perhaps. Some friend or relation of his taken up the quarrel?"

The stranger looked abstractedly at Starbottle. "You think a relation might, or would feel in that sort of way?"

"Why, blank it all, sir," said the Colonel, "nothing is

more common. Why, in '52 one of my oldest friends, Doctor Byrne, of St. Jo, the seventh in a line from old General Byrne, of St. Louis, was killed, sir, by Pinkey Riggs, seventh in a line from Senator Riggs, of Kentucky. Original cause, sir, something about a d—d roasting ear, or a blank persimmon in 1832; forty-seven men wiped out in twenty years. Fact, sir."

"It ain't that," said the stranger, moving hesitatingly in his chair. "If it was anything of that sort I wouldn't mind—it might bring matters to a wind-up, and I shouldn't have to come here and have this cursed talk with you."

It was so evident that this frank and unaffected expression of some obscure disgust with his own present position had no other implication, that the Colonel did not except to it. Yet the man did not go on. He stopped, and seemed lost in sombre contemplation of his hat.

The Colonel leaned back in his chair, fanned himself elegantly, wiped his forehead with a large pongee handkerchief, and looking at his companion, whose shadowed abstraction seemed to render him impervious to the heat, said—

"My dear Mr. Corbin, I perfectly understand you. Blank it all, sir, the temperature in this infernal hole is quite enough to render any confidential conversation between gentlemen upon delicate matters utterly impossible. It's almost as near Hades, sir, as they make it—as I trust you and I, Mr. Corbin, will ever experience. I propose," continued the Colonel, with airy geniality, "some light change and refreshment. The bar-keeper of the Magnolia is—er—I may say, sir, *facile princeps* in the concoction of mint-juleps, and there is a back room where I have occasionally conferred with political leaders at election time. It is but a step, sir—in fact, on Main Street, round the corner."

The stranger looked up, and then rose mechanically as the Colonel resumed his coat and waistcoat, but not his collar and cravat, which lay limp and dejected among his papers. Then, sheltering himself beneath a large-brimmed Panama hat, and hooking his cane on his arm, he led the way, fan in hand, into the road, tip-toeing in his tight, polished boots through the red, impalpable dust with his usual jaunty manner, yet not without a profane suggestion of burning ploughshares. The stranger strode in silence by his side in the burning sun, impenetrable in his own morose shadow.

But the Magnolia was fragrant, like its namesake, with mint and herbal odours, cool with sprinkled floors, and sparkling with broken ice on its counters, like dewdrops on white, unfolded petals—and slightly soporific with the subdued murmur of droning loungers, who were heavy with its sweets. The gallant Colonel nodded with confidential affability to the spotless-shirted bar-keeper, and then taking Corbin by the arm fraternally, conducted him into a small apartment in the rear of the bar-room. It was evidently used as the office of the proprietor, and contained a plain desk, table, and chairs. At the rear window Nature, not entirely evicted, looked in with a few straggling buckeyes and a dusty myrtle, over the body of a lately-felled pine-tree, that flaunted from an upflung branch a still green spray as if it were a drooping banner lifted by a dead but rigid arm. From the adjoining room the faint, monotonous click of billiard balls, languidly played, came at intervals like the dry notes of cicada in the bushes.

The bar-keeper brought two glasses crowned with mint and diademed with broken ice. The Colonel took a long pull at his portion, and leaned back in his chair with a bland gulp of satisfaction and dreamily patient eyes.

The stranger mechanically sipped the contents of his

glass, and then, without having altered his reluctant expression, drew from his breast-pocket a number of old letters. Holding them displayed in his fingers like a difficult hand of cards, and with something of the air of a dispirited player, he began—

“You see, about six months after this yer trouble I got this letter.” He picked out a well-worn, badly-written missive, and put it into Colonel Starbottle’s hands, rising at the same time and leaning over him as he read. “You see, she that writ it says as how she hadn’t heard from her son for a long time, but owing to his having spoken once about *me*, she was emboldened to write and ask me if I knew what had gone of him.” He was pointing his finger at each line of the letter as he read it, or rather seemed to translate it from memory with a sad familiarity. “Now,” he continued in parenthesis, “you see this kind o’ got me. I knew he had got relatives in Kentucky. I knew that all this trouble had been put in the paper with his name and mine, but this here name of Martha Jeffcourt at the bottom didn’t seem to jibe with it. Then I remembered that he had left a lot of letters in his trunk in the shanty, and I looked ’em over. And I found that his name *was* Tom Jeffcourt, and that he’d been passin’ under the name of Frisbee all this time.”

“Perfectly natural and a frequent occurrence,” interposed the Colonel cheerfully. “Only last year I met an old friend whom we’ll call Stidger, of New Orleans, at the Union Club, Frisco. ‘How are you, Stidger?’ I said, ‘I haven’t seen you since we used to meet—driving over the Shell Road in ’53.’ ‘Excuse me, sir,’ said he, ‘my name is not Stidger—it’s Brown.’ I looked him in the eye, sir, and saw him quiver. ‘Then I must apologise to Stidger,’ I said, ‘for supposing him capable of changing his name.’ He came to me an hour after, all in a tremble. ‘For

God's sake, Star,' he said—always called me Star—'don't go back on me, but you know family affairs—another woman, beautiful creature,' &c., &c.—yes, sir, perfectly common, but a blank mistake. When a man once funks his own name he'll turn tail on anything. Sorry for this man, Friezecoat, or Turncoat, or whatever's his d—d name; but it's so."

The suggestion did not, however, seem to raise the stranger's spirits or alter his manner. "His name was Jeffcourt, and this here was his mother," he went on drearily; "and you see here she says," pointing to the letter again, "she's been expecting money from him and it don't come, and she's mighty hard up. And that gave me an idea. I don't know," he went on, regarding the Colonel with gloomy doubt, "as you'll think it was much; I don't know as you wouldn't call it a d—d fool idea, but I got it all the same." He stopped, hesitated, and went on. "You see this man, Frisbee or Jeffcourt, was my pardner. We were good friends up to the killing, and then he drove me hard. I think I told you he drove me hard—didn't I? Well, he did. But the idea I got was this. Considerin' I killed him after all, and so to speak disappointed them, I reckoned I'd take upon myself the care of that family and send 'em money every month."

The Colonel slightly straightened his clean-shaven mouth. "A kind of expiation or amercement by fine, known to the Mosaic, Roman, and old English law. Gad, sir, the Jews might have made you *marry* his widow or sister. An old custom, and I think superseded—sir, properly superseded—by the alternative of ordeal by battle in the mediæval times. I don't myself fancy these pecuniary fashions of settling wrongs—but go on."

"I wrote her," continued Corbin, "that her son was dead, but that he and me had some interests together in a

claim, and that I was very glad to know where to send her what would be his share every month. I thought it no use to tell her I killed him—maybe she might refuse to take it. I sent her a hundred dollars every month since. Sometimes it's been pretty hard sleddin' to do it, for I ain't rich; sometimes I've had to borrow the money, but I reckoned that I was only paying for my share in this here business of his bein' dead, and I did it."

"And I understand you that this Jeffcourt really had no interest in your claim?"

Corbin looked at him in dull astonishment. "Not a cent, of course; I thought I told you that. But that weren't his fault, for he never had anything, and owed me money. In fact," he added gloomily, "it was because I hadn't any more to give him—havin' sold my watch for grub—that he quo'llied with me that day, and up and called me a 'sneakin' Yankee hound.' I told you he drove me hard."

The Colonel coughed slightly and resumed his jaunty manner. "And the—er—mother was, of course, grateful and satisfied?"

"Well, no—not exactly." He stopped again and took up his letters once more, sorted and arranged them as if to play out his unfinished but hopeless hand, and, drawing out another, laid it before the Colonel. "You see this Mrs. Jeffcourt, after a time, reckoned she ought to have *more* money than I sent her, and wrote saying that she had always understood from her son (he that never wrote but once a year, remember) that this claim of ours (that she never knew of, you know) was paying much more than I sent her—and she wanted a return of accounts and papers, or she'd write to some lawyer, mighty quick. Well, I reckoned that all this was naturally in the line of my trouble, and I did manage to scrape together fifty dollars more for two months and sent it. But that didn't seem to satisfy her—as you

see." He dealt Colonel Starbottle another letter from his baleful hand with an unchanged face. "When I got that, well, I just up and told her the whole thing. I sent her the account of the fight from the newspapers, and told her as how her son was the Frisbee that was my pardner, and how he never had a cent in the world—but how I'd got that idea to help her, and was willing to carry it out as long as I could."

"Did you keep a copy of that letter?" asked the Colonel, straitening his mask-like mouth.

"No," said Corbin moodily. "What was the good? I know'd she'd got the letter—and she did—for that is what she wrote back." He laid another letter before the Colonel, who hastily read a few lines and then brought his fat white hand violently on the desk.

"Why, d—n it all, sir, this is *blackmail*. As infamous a case of threatening and *chantage* as I ever heard of."

"Well," said Corbin dejectedly, "I don't know. You see she allows that I murdered Frisbee to get hold of his claim, and that I'm trying to buy her off, and that if I don't come down with twenty thousand dollars on the nail, and notes for the rest, she'll prosecute me. Well, mebbe the thing looks to her like that—mebbe you know I've got to shoulder that too. Perhaps it's all in the same line."

Colonel Starbottle for a moment regarded Corbin critically. In spite of his chivalrous attitude towards the homicidal faculty, the Colonel was not optimistic in regard to the baser pecuniary interests of his fellow-man. It was quite on the cards that his companion might have murdered his partner to get possession of the claim. It was true that Corbin had voluntarily assumed an unrecorded and hitherto unknown responsibility that had never been even suspected and was virtually self-imposed. But that might have been the usual one unerring blunder of criminal sagacity and forethought. It was equally true that he did not look or act

like a mean murderer ; but that was nothing. However, there was no evidence of these reflections in the Colonel's face. Rather he suddenly beamed with an excess of politeness. "Would you—er—mind, Mr. Corbin, whilst I am going over those letters again, to—er—step across to my office—and—er—bring me the copy of 'Wood's Digest' that lies on my table? It will save some time."

The stranger rose, as if the service was part of his self-imposed trouble, and as equally hopeless with the rest, and taking his hat, departed to execute the commission. As soon as he had left the building Colonel Starbottle opened the door and mysteriously beckoned the bar-keeper within.

"Do you remember anything of the killing of a man named Frisbee over in Fresno three years ago?"

The bar-keeper whistled meditatively. "Three years ago—Frisbee?—Fresno?—no? Yes—but that was only one of his names. He was Jack Walker over here. Yes—and by Jove! that feller that was here with you killed him. Darn my skin, but I thought I recognised him."

"Yes, yes, I know all that," said the Colonel impatiently. "But did Frisbee have any *property*? Did he have any means of his own?"

"Property?" echoed the bar-keeper, with scornful incredulity. "Property? Means? The only property and means he ever had was the free lunches or drinks he took in at somebody else's expense. Why, the only chance he ever had of earning a square meal was when that fellow that was with you just now took him up and made him his partner. And the only way *he* could get rid of him was to kill him! And I didn't think he had it in him. Rather a queer kind o' chap—good deal of hayseed about him. Showed up at the inquest so glum and orkerd that if the boys hadn't made up their minds this yer Frisbee *orter been* killed, it might have gone hard with him."

"Mr. Corbin," said Colonel Starbottle, with a pained but unmistakable hauteur and a singular elevation of his shirt frill, as if it had become of its own accord erectile, "Mr. Corbin—er, er—is the distant relative of old Major Corbin, of Nashville—er—one of my oldest political friends. When Mr. Corbin—er—returns, you can conduct him to me. And, if you please, replenish the glasses."

When the bar-keeper respectfully showed Mr. Corbin and "Wood's Digest" into the room again, the Colonel was still beaming and apologetic.

"A thousand thanks, sir, but, except to *show* you the law if you require it, hardly necessary. I have—er—glanced over the woman's letters again—it would be better perhaps if you had kept copies of your own—but still these tell the whole story and *your own*. The claim is preposterous! You have simply to drop the whole thing. Stop your remittances, stop your correspondence—pay no heed to any further letters, and wait results. You need fear nothing further, sir; I stake my professional reputation on it."

The gloom of the stranger seemed only to increase as the Colonel reached his triumphant conclusion.

"I reckoned you'd say that," he said slowly, "but it won't do. I shall go on paying as far as I can. It's my trouble, and I'll see it through."

"But, my dear sir, consider," gasped the Colonel. "You are in the hands of an infamous harpy, who is using her son's blood to extract money from you. You have already paid a dozen times more than the life of that d—d sneak was worth; and more than that—the longer you keep on paying you are helping to give colour to their claim and estopping your own defence. And Gad, sir, you're making a precedent for this sort of thing! you are offering a premium to widows and orphans. A gentleman won't be able to exchange shots with another without making himself

liable for damages. I am willing to admit that your feelings—though, in my opinion—er—exaggerated—do you credit; but I am satisfied that they are utterly misunderstood, sir.”

“Not by all of them,” said Corbin darkly.

“Eh?” returned the Colonel quickly.

“There was another letter here which I didn’t particularly point out to you,” said Corbin, taking up the letters again, “for I reckoned it wasn’t evidence, so to speak, being from *his cousin*—a girl—and calculated you’d read it when I was out.”

The Colonel coughed hastily. “I was in fact—er—just about to glance over it when you came in.”

“It was written,” continued Corbin, selecting a letter more bethumbed than the others, “after the old woman had threatened me. This here young woman allows that she is sorry that her aunt has to take money of me on account of her cousin being killed, and she is still sorrier that she is so bitter against me. She says she hadn’t seen her cousin since he was a boy, and used to play with her, and that she finds it hard to believe that he should ever grow up to change his name and act so as to provoke anybody to lift a hand against him. She says she supposed it must be something in that dreadful California that alters people and makes everybody so reckless. I reckon her head’s level there, ain’t it?”

There was such a sudden and unexpected lightening of the man’s face as he said it, such a momentary relief to his persistent gloom, that the Colonel, albeit inwardly dissenting from both letter and comment, smiled condescendingly.

“She’s no slouch of a scribe neither,” continued Corbin animatedly. “Read that.”

He handed his companion the letter, pointing to a passage

with his finger. The Colonel took it with, I fear, a somewhat lowered opinion of his client, and a new theory of the case. It was evident that]this weak submission to the aunt's conspiracy was only the result of a greater weakness for the niece. Colonel Starbottle had a wholesome distrust of the sex as a business or political factor. He began to look over the letter, but was evidently slurring it with superficial politeness, when Corbin said—

“Read it out loud.”

The Colonel slightly lifted his shoulders, fortified himself with another sip of the julep, and, leaning back, oratorically began to read, the stranger leaning over him and following line by line with shining eyes.

“When I say I am sorry for you, it is because I think it must be dreadful for you to be going round with the blood of a fellow-creature on your hands. It must be awful for you in the stillness of the night season to hear the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Cain, where is thy brother?’ and you saying, ‘Lord, I have slayed him dead.’ It must be awful for you when the pride of your wrath was surfitted, and his dum’ senseless corps’ was before you, not to know that it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ saith the Lord. . . . It was no use for you to say, ‘I never heard that before,’ remembering your teacher and parents. Yet verily I say unto you, ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be washed whiter than snow,’ saith the Lord.—Isaiah i. 18; and ‘Heart hath no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.’—My hymn-book, 1st Presbyterian Church, page 79. Mr. Corbin, I pity your feelin’s at the grave of my pore dear cousin, knowing he is before his Maker, and you can’t bring him back.” “Umph!—er—er—very good—very good indeed,” said the Colonel, hastily refolding the letter. “Very well meaning and er——.”

"Go on," said Corbin over his shoulder ; "you haven't read all."

"Ah, true. I perceive I overlooked something. Um—um. 'May God forgive you, Mr. Corbin, as I do, and make aunty think better of you, for it was good what you tried to do for her and the fammely, and I've always said it when she was raging round and wanting money of you. I don't believe you meant to do it anyway, owin' to your kindness of heart to the ophanless and the widow since you did it. Anser this letter, and don't mind what aunty says. So no more at present from—Yours very respectfully,

"SALLY DOWS.

"P.S.—There's been some troubel in our township, and some fitin'. May the Lord change ther hearts and make them as a little child, for if you are still young you may grow up different. I have writ a short prayer for you to say every night. You can coppy it out and put it at the head of your bed. It is this : O Lord, make me sorry for having killed Sarah Dows' cousin. Give me, O Lord, that peace that the world cannot give, and which fadeth not away ; for my yoke is heavy, and my burden is harder than I can bear.'"

The Colonel's deliberate voice stopped. There was a silence in the room, and the air seemed stifling. The click of the billiard balls came distinctly through the partition from the other room. Then there was another click, a stamp on the floor, and a voice crying coarsely, 'Curse it all—missed again !"

To the stranger's astonishment, the Colonel was on his feet in an instant, gasping with inarticulate rage. Flinging the door open, he confronted the startled bar-keeper em-purpled and stertorous.

"Blank it all, sir, do you call this a saloon for gentlemen,

or a corral for swearing cattle? Or do you mean to say that the conversation of two gentlemen upon delicate professional—and—er—domestic affairs, is to be broken upon by the blank profanity of low-bred hounds over their picyuane gambling! Take them my kyard, sir," choked the Colonel, who was always Southern and dialectic in his excited as in his softest moments, "and tell them that Colonel Starbottle will nevah dyarken these doahs again."

Before the astonished bar-keeper could reply, the Colonel had dashed back into the room, clapped his hat on his head, and seized his book, letters, and cane. "Mr. Corbin," he said with gasping dignity, "I will take these papahs, and consult them again in my own office—where, if you will do me the honour, sir, to call at ten o'clock to-morrow, I will give you my opinion." He strode out of the saloon beside the half awe-stricken, half amused, yet all discreetly silent loungers, followed by his wondering but gloomy client. At the door they parted, the Colonel tip-toeing towards his office as if dancing with rage, the stranger darkly plodding through the stifling dust in the opposite direction, with what might have been a faint suggestion to his counsellor that the paths of the homicide did not lie beside the still cool waters.

CHAPTER II.

THE house of Captain Masterton Dows, at Pineville, Kentucky, was a fine specimen of Southern classical architecture, being an exact copy of Major Fauquier's house in Virginia, which was in turn only a slight variation from a well-known statesman's historical villa in Alabama, that everybody knew was designed from a famous Greek Temple on the Piræus. Not but that it shared this resemblance

with the County Court House and the Oddfellows' Hall, but the addition of training jessamine and Cherokee rose to the columns of the portico, and over the colonnade leading to its offices, showed a certain domestic distinction. And the sky line of its incongruously high roof was pleasantly broken against adjacent green pines, "butter-nut," and darker cypress.

A nearer approach showed the stuccoed gate-posts—whose red brick core was revealed through the dropping plaster—opening in a wall of half-rough stone, half-wooden palisade, equally covered with shining moss and parasitical vines, which hid a tangled garden left to its own unkempt luxuriance. Yet there was a reminiscence of past formality and even pretentiousness in a wide box-bordered terrace and one or two stuccoed vases prematurely worn and time-stained; while several rare exotics had, however, thriven so unwisely and well in that stimulating soil as to lose their exclusive refinement and acquire a certain temporary vulgarity. A few, with the not uncommon enthusiasm of aliens, had adopted certain native peculiarities with a zeal that far exceeded any indigenous performance. But dominant through all was the continual suggestion of precocious fruition and premature decay that lingered like a sad perfume in the garden, but made itself persistent if less poetical in the house.

Here the fluted wooden columns of the portico and colonnade seemed to have taken upon themselves a sodden and unwholesome age unknown to stone and mortar. Moss and creeper clung to paint that time had neither dried nor mellowed, but left still glairy in its white consistency. There were rusty red blotches around inflamed nail-holes in the swollen wood, as of punctures in living flesh; along the entablature and cornices and in the dank gutters decay had taken the form of a mild deliquescence; and the pillars

were spotted, as if Nature had dropped over the too early ruin a few unclean tears. The house itself was lifted upon a broad wooden foundation painted to imitate marble with such hopeless mendacity that the architect at the last moment had added a green border, and the owner permitted a fallen board to remain off so as to allow a few privileged fowls to openly explore the interior. When Miss Sally Dows played the piano in the drawing-room she was at times accompanied by the uplifted voice of the sympathetic hounds who sought its quiet retreat in ill-health or low spirits, and from whom she was separated only by an imperfectly carpeted floor of yawning seams. The infant progeny of "Mammy Judy," an old nurse, made this a hiding-place from domestic justice, where they were eventually betrayed by subterranean giggling that had once or twice brought bashful confusion to the hearts of Miss Sally's admirers, and mischievous security to that finished coquette herself.

It was a pleasant September afternoon, on possibly one of these occasions, that Miss Sally, sitting before the piano, alternately striking a few notes with three pink fingers and glancing at her reflection in the polished rosewood surface of the lifted keyboard case, was heard to utter this languid protest—

"Quit that kind of talk, Chet, unless you just admire to have every word of it repeated all over the county. Those little niggers of Mammy Judy's are lying round somewhere, and are mighty 'cute and sassy, I tell you. It's nothin' to *me*, sure, but Miss Hilda mightn't like to hear of it. So soon after your particular attention to her at last night's pawty too."

Here a fresh-looking young fellow of six-and-twenty, leaning uneasily over the piano from the opposite side, was heard to murmur that he didn't care what Miss Hilda

heard, nor the whole world for the matter of that. "But," he added, with a faint smile, "folks allow that you know how to *play up* sometimes, and put on the loud pedal when you don't want Mammy's niggers to hear."

"Indeed," said the young lady demurely. "Like this?"

She put out a distracting little foot, clothed in the white stocking and cool black prunella slippers then *de rigueur* in the State, and pressing it on the pedal, began to drum vigorously on the keys. In vain the amorous Chet protested in a voice which the instrument drowned. Perceiving which, the artful young lady opened her blue eyes mildly and said—

"I reckon it *is* so; it *does* kind of prevent you hearing what you don't want to hear."

"You know well enough what I mean," said the youth gloomily. "And that ain't all that folks say. They allow that you're doin' a heap too much correspondence with that Californian rough that killed Tom Jeffcourt over there."

"Do they?" said the young lady, with a slight curl of her pretty lip. "Then perhaps they allow] that if it wasn't for me he wouldn't be sending a hundred dollars a month to Aunt Martha?"

"Yes," said the fatuous youth; "but they allow he killed Tom for his money. And they do say it's mighty queer doin's in yo' writin' religious letters to him, and Tom your own cousin."

"Oh, they tell those lies *here*, do they? But do they say anything about how, when the same lies were told over in California, the lawyer they've got over there, called Colonel Starbottle—a Southern man too—got up and just wrote to Aunt Martha that she'd better quit that afore she got prosecuted? They didn't tell you that, did they, Mister Chester Brooks?"

But here the unfortunate Brooks, after the fashion of all

jealous lovers, deserted his allies for his fair enemy. "I don't cotton to what *they* say, Sally, but you *do* write to him; and I don't see what you've got to write about—you and him. Jule Jeffcourt says that when you got religion at Louisville during the revival, you felt you had a call to write and save sinners, and you did that as your trial and probation, but that since you backslided and are worldly again, and go to parties, you just keep it up for foolin' and flirtin'! *She* ain't goin' to weaken on the man that shot her brother, just because he's got a gold mine and—a moustache!"

"She takes his *money* all the same," said Miss Sally.

"*She* don't—her mother does. *She* says if she was a man she'd have blood for blood!"

"My!" said Miss Sally, in affected consternation. "It's a wonder she don't apply to you to act for her."

"If it was *my* brother he killed, I'd challenge him quick enough," said Chet, flushing through his thin pink skin and light hair.

"Marry her, then, and that'll make you one of the family. I reckon Miss Hilda can bear it," rejoined the young lady pertly.

"Look here, Miss Sally," said the young fellow, with a boyish despair that was not without a certain pathos in its implied inferiority, "I ain't gifted like you—I ain't on yo' level nohow; I can't pass yo' on the road, and so I reckon I must take yo' dust as yo' make it. But there's one thing, Miss Sally, I want to tell you. You know what's going on in this country—you've heard your father say what the opinion of the best men is, and what's likely to happen if the Yanks force that nigger worshipper, Lincoln, on the South. You know that we're drawing the line closer every day, and spottin' the men that ain't sound. Take care, Miss Sally, you ain't sellin' us cheap to some Northern Abolitionist

who'd like to set Marm Judy's little niggers to something worse than eavesdropping down there, and mebbe teach 'em to kindle a fire underneath yo' own flo'."

He had become quite dialectic in his appeal, as if youthfully reverting to some accent of the nursery, or as if he were exhorting her in some recognised shibboleth of a section. Miss Sally rose and shut down the piano. Then leaning over it on her elbows, her rounded little chin slightly elevated with languid impertinence, and one saucy foot kicked backwards beyond the hem of her white cotton frock, she said, "And let me tell you, Mister Chester Brooks, that it's just such God-forsaken infant phenomenons as you who want to run the whole country that make all this fuss, when you ain't no more fit to be trusted with matches than Judy's children. What do *you* know of Mr. Jo Corbin, when you don't even know that he's from Shelbyville, and as good a Suth'ner as you, and if he hasn't got niggers it's because they don't use them in his parts? Yo'r for all the world like one o' Mrs. Johnson's fancy Bantams, that ain't quit of the shell afore they square off at their own mother. My goodness! Sho! Sho-o-o!" And suiting the action to the word the young lady, still indolently, even in her simulation, swirled around, caught her skirts at the side with each hand, and lazily shaking them before her in the accepted feminine method of frightening chickens as she retreated backwards, dropped them suddenly in a profound curtsy and swept out of the parlour.

Nevertheless, as she entered the sitting-room she paused to listen, then, going to the window, peeped through the slits of the Venetian blind and saw her youthful admirer, more dejected in the consciousness of his wasted efforts and useless attire, mount his showy young horse, as aimlessly spirited as himself, and ride away. Miss Sally did not regret this; neither had she been entirely sincere in her defence of

her mysterious correspondent. But, like many of her sex, she was trying to keep up by the active stimulus of opposition an interest that she had begun to think if left to itself might wane. She was conscious that her cousin Julia, although impertinent and illogical, was right in considering her first epistolary advances to Corbin as a youthful convert's religious zeal. But now that her girlish enthusiasm was spent, and the revival itself had proved as fleeting an excitement as the old "Tournament of Love and Beauty," which it had supplanted, she preferred to believe that she enjoyed the fascinating impropriety because it was the actual result of her religious freedom. Perhaps she had a vague idea that Corbin's conversion would expiate her present preference for dress and dancing. She had certainly never flirted with him; they had never exchanged photographs; there was not a passage in his letters that might not have been perused by her parents—which, I fear, was probably one reason why she had never shown her correspondence; and beyond the fact that this letter-writing gave her a certain importance in her own eyes and those of her companions, it might really be stopped. She even thought of writing at once to him that her parents objected to its further continuance, but remembering that his usual monthly letter was now nearly due, she concluded to wait until it came.

It is to be feared that Miss Sally had little help in the way of family advice, and that the moral administration of the Dows' household was as prematurely developed and as precociously exhausted as the estate and mansion themselves. Captain Dows' marriage with Josephine Jeffcourt, the daughter of a "poor white," had been considered a *mésalliance* by his family, and his own sister, Miranda Dows, had abandoned her brother's roof and refused to associate with the Jeffcourts, only returning to the house and an armed neutrality at the death of Mrs. Dows a few years

later. She had taken charge of Miss Sally, sending her to school at Nashville until she was recalled by her father two years ago. It may be imagined that Miss Sally's correspondence with Jeffcourt's murderer had afforded her a mixed satisfaction; it was at first asserted that Miss Sally's forgiveness was really prompted by "Miss Mirandy," as a subtle sarcasm upon the family. When, however, that forgiveness seemed to become a source of revenue to the impoverished Jeffcourts, her Christian interference had declined.

For this reason possibly the young girl did not seek her aunt in the bedroom, the dining-room, or the business-room, where Miss Miranda frequently assisted Captain Dows in the fatuous and prejudiced mismanagement of the house and property, nor in any of the vacant guest-rooms, which, in their early wreck of latter-day mahogany and rosewood, seemed to have been unoccupied for ages, but went directly to her own room. This was in the "L," a lately added wing that had escaped the gloomy architectural tyranny of the main building, and gave Miss Sally light, ventilation, the freshness and spice of new pine boards and clean paper, and a separate entrance and windows on a cool verandah all to herself. Intended as a concession to the young lady's travelled taste, it was really a reversion to the finer simplicity of the pioneer.

New as the apartment appeared to be, it was old enough to contain the brief little records of her maidenhood: the childish samplers and pictures; the sporting epoch, with its fox-heads, opossum and wild-cat skins, riding-whip, and the goshawk in a cage, which Miss Sally believed could be trained as a falcon; the religious interval of illustrated texts, "Rock of Ages," cardboard crosses, and the certificate of her membership with "The Daughters of Sion" at the head of her little bed, down to the last decadence of frivolity shown in the be-ribboned guitar in the corner, and the

dance cards, favours, and rosettes, military buttons, dried bouquets, and other love gages on the mantelpiece.

The young girl opened a drawer of her table and took out a small packet of letters tied up with a green ribbon. As she did so she heard the sound of hoofs in the rear courtyard. This was presently followed by a step on the verandah, and she opened the door to her father with the letters still in her hand. There was neither the least embarrassment nor self-consciousness in her manner.

Captain Dows, superficially remarkable only for a certain odd combination of high military stock and turned-over planter's collar, was slightly exalted by a sympathetic mingling of politics and mint julep at Pineville Court House. "I was passing by the post-office at the Cross Roads last week, dear," he began cheerfully, "and I thought of you, and reckoned it was about time that my Pussy got one of her letters from her rich Californian friend—and sure enough there was one. I clean forgot to give it to you then, and only remembered it passing there to-day. I didn't get to see if there was any gold dust in it," he continued, with great archness, and a fatherly pinch of her cheek; "though I suspect that isn't the kind of currency he sends to you."

"It *is* from Mr. Corbin," said Miss Sally, taking it with a languid kind of doubt; "and only now, paw, I was just thinking that I'd sort of drop writing any more; it makes a good deal of buzzing amongst the neighbours, and I don't see much honey nor comb in it."

"Eh," said the Captain, apparently more astonished than delighted at his daughter's prudence. "Well, child, suit yourself! It's mighty mean, though, for I was just thinking of telling you that Judge Read is an old friend of this Colonel Starbottle, who is your friend's friend and lawyer, and he says that Colonel Starbottle is *with us*, and

working for the Cause out there, and has got a list of all the So'thern men in California that are sound and solid for the South. Read says he shouldn't wonder if he'd make California wheel into line too."

"I don't see what that's got to do with Mr. Corbin," said the young girl impatiently, flicking the still unopened letter against the packet in her hand.

"Well," said the Captain, with cheerful vagueness, "I thought it might interest you—that's all," and lounged judicially away.

"Paw thinks," said Miss Sally, still standing in the doorway ostentatiously, addressing her pet goshawk, but with one eye following her retreating parent—"paw thinks that everybody is as keen bent on politics as he is. There's where paw slips up, Jim."

Re-entering the room, scratching her little nose thoughtfully with the edge of Mr. Corbin's letter, she went to the mantel-piece and picked up a small ivory-handled dagger, the gift of Joyce Masterton, aged eighteen, presented with certain verses addressed to a "Daughter of the South," and cut open the envelope. The first glance was at her own name, and then at the signature. There was no change in the formality; it was "Dear Miss Sarah," and "Yours respectfully, Jo Corbin," as usual. She was still secure. But her pretty brows contracted slightly as she read as follows:—

"I've always allowed I should feel easier in my mind if I could ever get to see Mrs. Jeffcourt, and that maybe she might feel easier in hers if I stood before her face to face. Even if she didn't forgive me at once, it might do her good to get off what she had on her mind against me. But as there wasn't any chance of her coming to me, and it was out of the question my coming to her and still keeping up enough work in the mines to send her the regular money,

it couldn't be done. But at last I've got a partner to run the machine when I'm away. I shall be at Shelbyville by the time this reaches you, where I shall stay a day or two to give you time to break the news to Mrs. Jeffcourt, and then come on. You will do this for me in your Christian kindness, Miss Dows—won't you? and if you could soften her mind so as to make it less hard for me I shall be grateful.

"P.S.—I forgot to say I have had *him* exhumed—you know who I mean—and am bringing him with me in a patent metallic burial casket—the best that could be got in 'Frisco, and will see that he is properly buried in your own graveyard. It seemed to me that it would be the best thing I could do, and might work upon her feelings—as it has on mine. Don't you? J. C."

Miss Sally felt the tendrils of her fair hair stir with consternation. The letter had arrived a week ago; perhaps he was in Pineville at that very moment! She must go at once to the Jeffcourts—it was only a mile distant. Perhaps she might be still in time; but even then it was a terribly short notice for such a meeting. Yet she stopped to select her newest hat from the closet, and to tie it with the largest of bows under her pretty chin; and then skipped from the verandah into a green lane that ran beside the garden boundary. There, hidden by a hedge, she dropped into a long, swinging trot, that even in her haste still kept the languid deliberation characteristic of her people, until she had reached the road. Two or three hounds in the garden started joyously to follow her, but she drove them back with a portentous frown, and an ill-aimed stone, and a suppressed voice. Yet in that backward glance she could see that her little Eumenides—Mammy Judy's children—were peering at her from below the wooden floor of the

portico, which they were grasping with outstretched arms and bowed shoulders, as if they were black caryatides supporting—as indeed their race had done for many a year—the pre-doomed and decaying mansion of their master.

CHAPTER III.

HAPPILY Miss Sally thought more of her present mission than the past errors of her people. The faster she walked the more vividly she pictured the possible complications of this meeting. She knew the dull, mean nature of her aunt, and the utter hopelessness of all appeal to anything but her selfish cupidity, and saw in this fatuous essay of Corbin only an aggravation of her worst instincts. Even the dead body of her son would not only whet her appetite for pecuniary vengeance, but give it plausibility in the eyes of their emotional but ignorant neighbours. She had still less to hope from Julia Jeffcourt's more honest and human indignation, but equally bigoted and prejudiced intelligence. It is true they were only women, and she ought to have no fear of that physical revenge which Julia had spoken of, but she reflected that Miss Jeffcourt's unmistakable beauty, and what was believed to be a "truly Southern spirit," had gained her many admirers who might easily take her wrongs upon their shoulders. If her father had only given her that letter before she might have stopped Corbin's coming at all; she might even have met him in time to hurry him and her cousin's provocative remains out of the country. In the midst of these reflections she had to pass the little hill-side cemetery. It was a spot of great natural beauty, cypress-shadowed and luxuriant. It was justly celebrated in Pineville, and, but for its pretentious tombstones, might

have been peaceful and suggestive. Here she recognised a figure just turning from its gate. It was Julia Jeffcourt.

Her first instinct—that she was too late, and that her cousin had come to the cemetery to make some arrangements for the impending burial—was, however, quickly dissipated by the young girl's manner.

"Well, Sally Dows, *you* here! who'd have thought of seeing you to-day? Why, Chet Brooks allowed that you danced every set last night, and didn't get home till daylight. And you—you that are going to show up at another party to-night, too! Well, I reckon I haven't got that much ambition these times. And out with your new bonnet, too."

There was a slight curl of her handsome lip as she looked at her cousin. She was certainly a more beautiful girl than Miss Sally; very tall, dark and luminous of eye, with a brunette pallor of complexion, suggesting, it was said, that remote mixture of blood which was one of the unproven counts of Miss Miranda's indictment against her family. Miss Sally smiled sweetly behind her big bow. "If you reckon to tie to everything that Chet Brooks says, you'll want lots of string, and you won't be safe then. You ought have heard him run on about this one, and that one, and that other one, not an hour ago in our parlour. I had to pack him off, saying he was even making Judy's niggers tired." She stopped and added with polite languor, "I suppose there's no news up at yo' house either? Everything's going on as usual—and—you get yo' California draft regularly?"

A good deal of the white of Julia's beautiful eyes showed as she turned indignantly on the speaker. "I wish, Cousin Sally, you'd just let up talking to me about that money. You know as well as I do that I allowed to maw I wouldn't take a cent of it from the first! I might have had all the gowns and bonnets" (with a look at Miss Sally's bows) "I

wanted from her; she even offered to take me to St. Louis for a rig out—if I'd been willing to take blood-money. But I'd rather stick to this old sleazy mou'nin' for Tom" (she gave a dramatic pluck at her faded black skirt) "than flaunt round in white muslins and China silks at ten dollars a yard, paid for by his murderer."

"You know black's yo' colour always—taking in your height and complexion, Jule," said Miss Sally demurely, yet not without a feminine consciousness that it really did set off her cousin's graceful figure to perfection. "But you can't keep up this gait always. You know some day you might come upon this Mr. Corbin."

"He'd better not cross my path," she said passionately.

"I've heard girls talk like that about a man, and then get just green and yellow after him," said Miss Sally critically. "But, goodness me! speaking of meeting people reminds me I clean forgot to stop at the stage office and see about bringing over the new overseer. Lucky I met you, Jule! Good-bye, dear. Come in to-night, and we'll all go to the party together." And with a little nod she ran off before her indignant cousin could frame a suitably crushing reply to her Parthian insinuation.

But at the stage office Miss Sally only wrote a few lines on a card, put it in an envelope, which she addressed to Mr. Joseph Corbin, and then seating herself with easy carelessness on a long packing-box, languidly summoned the proprietor.

"You're always on hand yourself at Kirby station when the kyars come in to bring passengers to Pineville, Mr. Sledge?"

"Yes, miss."

"Yo' haven't brought any strangers over lately?"

"Well, last week Squire Farnham of Green Ridge—if he kin be called a stranger—as used to live in the very house yo' father——"

"Yes, I know," said Miss Sally impatiently; "but if an *entire* stranger comes to take a seat for Pineville, you ask him if that's 'his name,'" handing the letter, "and give it to him if it is. And—Mr. Sledge—it's nobody's business but—yours and mine."

"I understand, Miss Sally," with a slow, paternal, tolerating wink. "He'll get it, and nobody else, sure."

"Thank you. I hope Mrs. Sledge is getting round again?"

"Pow'fully, Miss Sally."

Having thus, as she hoped, stopped the arrival of the unhappy Corbin, Miss Sally returned home to consider the best means of finally disposing of him. She had insisted upon his stopping at Kirby and holding no communication with the Jeffcourts until he heard from her, and had strongly pointed out the hopeless infelicity of his plan. She dare not tell her Aunt Miranda, knowing that she would be too happy to precipitate an interview that would terminate disastrously to both the Jeffcourts and Corbin. She might have to take her father into her confidence—a dreadful contingency.

She was dressed for the evening party, which was provincially early; indeed, it was scarcely past nine o'clock when she had finished her toilet, when there came a rap at her door. It was one of Mammy Judy's children.

"Dey is a gemplum, Miss Sally."

"Yes, yes," said Miss Sally impatiently, thinking only of her escort. "I'll be there in a minute. Run away. He can wait."

"And he said I was to guv yo' dis yer," continued the little negro, with portentous gravity, presenting a card.

Miss Sally took it with a smile. It was a plain card on which was written with a pencil in a hand she hurriedly recognised—

"Joseph Corbin."

Miss Sally's smile became hysterically rigid, and pushing the boy aside with a little cry, she darted along the verandah and entered the parlour from a side door and vestibule. To her momentary relief she saw that her friends had not yet arrived: a single figure—a stranger's—rose as she entered.

Even in her consternation she had time to feel the added shock of disappointment. She had always present in her mind an ideal picture of this man, whom she had never seen or even heard described. Joseph Corbin had been tall, dark, with flowing hair and long moustache. He had flashing fiery eyes, which were capable of being subdued by a single glance of gentleness—her own. He was tempestuous, quick and passionate, but in quarrel would be led by a smile. He was a combination of an Italian brigand and a poker player whom she had once met on a Mississippi steamboat. He would wear a broad-brimmed soft hat, a red shirt, showing his massive throat and neck—and high boots! Alas! the man before her was of medium height, with light close-cut hair, hollow cheeks that seemed to have been lately scraped with a razor, and light grey troubled eyes. A suit of cheap black, ill fitting, hastily acquired and provincial even for Pineville, painfully set off these imperfections, to which a white cravat in a hopelessly tied bow was superadded. A terrible idea that this combination of a country undertaker and an ill-paid circuit preacher on probation was his best holiday tribute to her, and not a funeral offering to Mr. Jeffcourt, took possession of her. And when, with feminine quickness, she saw his eyes wander over her own fine clothes and festal figure, and sink again upon the floor in a kind of hopeless disappointment equal to her own, she felt ready to cry. But the more terrible sound of laughter approaching the house from the garden recalled her. Her friends were coming.

"For Heaven's sake," she broke out desperately, "didn't you get my note at the station telling you not to come?"

His face grew darker, and then took up its look of hopeless resignation, as if this last misfortune was only an accepted part of his greater trouble, as he sat down again, and to Miss Sally's horror, listlessly swung his hat to and fro under his chair.

"No," he said gloomily; "I didn't go to no station. I walked here all the way from Shelbyville. I thought it might seem more like the square thing to her for me to do. I sent *him* by express ahead in the box. It's been at the stage office all day."

With a sickening conviction that she had been sitting on her cousin's body while she wrote that ill-fated card, the young girl managed to gasp out impatiently, "But you must go—yes—go now, at once! Don't talk now, but go."

"I didn't come here," he said, rising with a kind of slow dignity, "to interfere with things I didn't kalkilate to see," glancing again at her dress, as the voices came nearer, "and that I ain't in touch with—but to know if you think I'd better bring him—or——"

He did not finish the sentence, for the door had opened suddenly, and a half-dozen laughing girls and their escorts burst into the room. But among them, a little haughty and still irritated from her last interview, was her cousin Julia Jeffcourt, erect and beautiful, in a sombre silk.

"Go," repeated Miss Sally, in an agonised whisper. "You must not be known here."

But the attention of Julia had been arrested by her cousin's agitation, and her eye fell on Corbin, where it was fixed with some fatal fascination that seemed in turn to enthral and possess him also. To Miss Sally's infinite dismay, the others fell back and allowed these two black figures to stand out, then to move towards each other with

the same terrible magnetism. They were so near she could not repeat her warning to him without the others hearing it. And all hope died when Corbin, turning deliberately towards her with a grave gesture in the direction of Julia, said quietly—

“Interduce me.”

Miss Sally hesitated, and then gasped hastily—“Miss Jeffcourt.”

“Yer don’t say *my* name. Tell her I’m Joseph Corbin of ’Frisco, California, who killed her brother.” He stopped and turned towards her. “I came here to try and fix things again—and I’ve brought *him*.”

In the wondering silence that ensued the others smiled vacantly, breathlessly, and expectantly, until Corbin advanced and held out his hand, when Julia Jeffcourt, drawing hers back to her bosom with the palms outward, uttered an inarticulate cry—and spat in his face!

With that act she found tongue—reviling him, the house that harboured him, the insolence that presented him, the insult that had been put upon her! “Are you men?” she added passionately, “who stand here with the man before you that killed my brother, and see him offer me his filthy villainous hand—and dare not strike him down!”

And they dared not. Violently, blindly, stupidly moved through all their instincts, though they gathered hysterically around him, there was something in his dull self-containment that was unassailable and awful. For he wiped his face and breast with his handkerchief without a tremor, and turned to them with even a suggestion of relief.

“She’s right, gentlemen,” he said gravely. “She’s right. It might have been otherwise. I might have allowed that it might be otherwise—but she’s right. I’m a Soth’n man myself, gentlemen, and I reckon to understand what she has done. I killed the only man that had a right to stand

up for her, and she has now to stand up for herself. But if she wants—and you see she allows she wants—to pass that on to some of you, or all of you, I'm willing. As many as you like, and in what way you like—I waive any chyce of weapon—I'm ready, gentlemen. I came here—with *him*—for that purpose.”

Perhaps it may have been his fateful resignation, perhaps it may have been his exceeding readiness—but there was no response. He sat down again, and again swung his hat slowly and gloomily to and fro under his chair.

“I've got him in a box at the stage office,” he went on, apparently to the carpet. “I had him dug up that I might bring him here, and mebbe bury some of the trouble and difference along with his friends. It might be,” he added, with a slightly glowering upward glance, as to an overruling but occasionally misdirecting Providence, “it might be, from the way things are piling up on me, that some one might have rung in another corpse instead o' *him*, but so far as I can judge, allowin' for the space of time and nat'ral wear and tear—it's *him*!”

He rose slowly and moved towards the door in a silence that was as much the result of some conviction that any violent demonstration against him would be as grotesque and monstrous as the situation, as of anything he had said. Even the flashing indignation of Julia Jeffcourt seemed to become suddenly as unnatural and incongruous as her brother's chief mourner himself, and although she shrank from his passing figure she uttered no word. Chester Brooks's youthful emotions, following the expression of Miss Sally's face, lost themselves in a vague hysteric smile, and the other gentlemen looked sheepish. Joseph Corbin halted at the door.

“Whatever,” he said, turning to the company, “ye make up your mind to do about me, I reckon ye'd better do it

after the funeral. *I'm* always ready. But *he*, what with being in a box and changing climate, had better go *first*." He paused, and with a suggestion of delicacy in the momentary drooping of his eyelids, added—"for *reasons*."

He passed out through the door, on to the portico, and thence into the garden. It was noticed at the time that the half-dozen hounds lingering there rushed after him with their usual noisy demonstrations, but that they as suddenly stopped, retreated violently to the security of the basement, and there gave relief to their feelings in a succession of prolonged howls.

CHAPTER IV.

It must not be supposed that Miss Sally did not feel some contrition over the ineffective part she had played in this last episode. But Joseph Corbin had committed the unpardonable sin to a woman of destroying her own illogical ideas of him, which was worse than if he had affronted the preconceived ideas of others, in which case she might still defend him. Then, too, she was no longer religious, and had no "call" to act as peacemaker. Nevertheless she resented Julia Jeffcourt's insinuations bitterly, and the cousins quarrelled—not the first time in their intercourse—and it was reserved for the latter to break the news of Corbin's arrival with the body to Mrs. Jeffcourt.

How this was done and what occurred at that interview has not been recorded. But it was known the next day that, while Mrs. Jeffcourt accepted the body at Corbin's hands—and, it is presumed, the funeral expenses also—he was positively forbidden to appear either at the services at the house or at the church. There had been some wild talk among the younger and many of the lower members of the com-

munity, notably the "poor" non-slave-holding whites—of tarring and feathering Joseph Corbin, and riding him on a rail out of the town on the day of the funeral, as a propitiatory sacrifice to the manes of Thomas Jeffcourt; but it being pointed out by the undertaker that it might involve some uncertainty in the settlement of his bill, together with some reasonable doubt of the thorough resignation of Corbin, whose previous momentary aberration in that respect they were celebrating, the project was postponed until *after the funeral*. And here an unlooked-for incident occurred.

There was to be a political meeting at Kirby on that day, when certain distinguished Southern leaders had gathered from the remoter Southern States. At the instigation of Captain Dows it was adjourned at the hour of the funeral to enable members to attend, and it was even rumoured, to the great delight of Pineville, that a distinguished speaker or two might come over to "improve the occasion" with some slight allusion to the engrossing topic of "Southern Rights." This combined appeal to the domestic and political emotions of Pineville was irresistible. The Second Baptist Church was crowded. After the religious service there was a pause, and Judge Read, stepping forward amid a breathless silence, said that they were peculiarly honoured by the unexpected presence in their midst "of that famous son of the South, Colonel Starbottle," who had lately returned to his native soil from his adopted home in California. Every eye was fixed on the distinguished stranger as he rose.

Jaunty and gallant as ever, femininely smooth-faced, yet polished and high-coloured as a youthful mask; pectorally expansive, and unfolding the white petals of his waistcoat through the swollen lapels of his coat, like a bursting magnolia bud, Colonel Starbottle began. The present associations were, he might say, singularly hallowed to him; not only was Pineville—a Southern centre—the recognised

nursery of Southern chivalry, Southern beauty (a stately inclination to the pew in which Miss Sally and Julia Jeffcourt sat), Southern intelligence, and Southern independence, but it was the home of the lamented dead, who had been, like himself and another he should refer to later, an adopted citizen of the Golden State, a seeker of the Golden Fleece, a companion of Jason. It was the home, fellow-citizens and friends, of the sorrowing sister of the deceased, a young lady whom he, the speaker, had as yet known only through the chivalrous blazon of her virtues and graces by her attendant knights (a courteous wave towards the gallery where Joyce Masterton, Chester Brooks, Calhoun Bungsstarter, and the embattled youth generally of Pineville became empurpled and idiotic); it was the home of the afflicted widowed mother, also personally unknown to him, but with whom he might say he had had—er—er—professional correspondence. But it was not this alone that hallowed the occasion, it was a sentiment that should speak in trumpet-like tones throughout the South in this uprising of an united section. It was the forgetfulness of petty strife, of family feud, of personal wrongs in the claims of party! It might not be known that he, the speaker, was professionally cognisant of one of these regrettable—should he say accidents—arising from the chivalrous challenge and equally chivalrous response of two fiery Southern spirits, to which they primarily owed their coming here that day. And he should take it as his duty, his solemn duty, in that sacred edifice to proclaim to the world that in his knowledge as a professional man—as a man of honour, as a Southerner, as a gentleman, that the—er—circumstances which three years ago led to the early demise of our lamented friend and brother reflected only the highest credit equally on both of the parties. He said this on his own responsibility—in or out of this sacred edifice—and in or out of that sacred edifice he was personally responsible,

and prepared to give the fullest satisfaction for it. He was also aware that it might not be known—or understood—that since that boyish episode the survivor had taken the place of the departed in the bereaved family and ministered to their needs with counsel and—er—er—pecuniary aid, and had followed the body afoot across the continent that it might rest with its kindred dust. He was aware that an unchristian—he would say but for that sacred edifice—a *dastardly* attempt had been made to impugn the survivor's motives—to suggest an unseemly discord between him and the family, but he, the speaker, would never forget the letter breathing with Christian forgiveness and replete with angelic simplicity sent by a member of that family to his client, which came under his professional eye (here the professional eye for a moment lingered on the hysteric face of Miss Sally); he did not envy the head or heart of a man who could peruse these lines—of which the mere recollection—er—er—choked the utterance of even a professional man like—er—himself—without emotion. “And what, my friends and fellow-citizens,” suddenly continued the Colonel, replacing his white handkerchief in his coat tail, “was the reason why *my* client, Mr. Joseph Corbin—whose delicacy keeps him from appearing among these mourners—comes here to bury all differences, all animosities, all petty passions? Because he is a son of the South; because as a son of the South, as the representative, and a distant connection, I believe, of my old political friend, Major Corbin, of Nashville, he wishes here and everywhere, at this momentous crisis, to sink everything in the one all-pervading, all-absorbing, one and indivisible *unity* of the South in its resistance to the Northern Usurper! That, my friends, is the great, the solemn, the Christian lesson of this most remarkable occasion in my professional, political, and social experience!”

Whatever might have been the calmer opinion, there was

no doubt that the gallant Colonel had changed the prevailing illogical emotion of Pineville by the substitution of another equally illogical, and Miss Sally was not surprised when her father, touched by the Colonel's allusion to his daughter's epistolary powers, insisted upon bringing Joseph Corbin home with him, and offering him the hospitality of the Dows' mansion. Although the stranger seemed to yield rather from the fact that the Dows were relations of the Jeffcourts than from any personal preference, when he was fairly installed in one of the appropriately gloomy guest chambers, Miss Sally set about the delayed work of reconciliation—theoretically accepted by her father, and cynically tolerated by her Aunt Miranda. But here a difficulty arose which she had not foreseen. Although Corbin had evidently forgiven her defection on that memorable evening, he had not apparently got over the revelation of her giddy worldliness, and was resignedly apathetic and distrustful of her endeavours. She was at first amused, and then angry. And her patience was exhausted when she discovered that he actually seemed more anxious to conciliate Julia Jeffcourt than her mother.

"But she spat in your face," she said indignantly.

"That's so," he replied gloomily; "but I reckoned you said something in one of your letters about turning the other cheek when you were smitten. Of course, as you don't believe it now," he added, with his upward glance, "I suppose *that's* been played on me, too."

But here Miss Sally's spirit lazily rebelled.

"Look here, Mr. Joseph *Jeremiah* Corbin," she returned, with languid impertinence, "if instead of cavortin' round on yo' knees trying to conciliate an old woman who never had a stroke of luck till you killed her son, and a young girl who won't be above letting on afore you think it that your conciliatin' her means *sparkin'* her—if instead of that

foolishness you'd turn your hand to trying to conciliate the folks here and keep 'em from going into that fool's act of breaking up these United States ; if instead of digging up second-hand corpses that's already been put out of sight once you'd set to work to try and prevent the folks about here from digging up their old cranks and their old whims, and their old women fancies, you'd be doing something like a Christian and a man ! What's yo' blood-guiltiness, I'd like to know, alongside of the blood-guiltiness of those fools who are just wild to rush into it, led by such turkey-cocks as yo' friend Colonel Starbottle ? And you've been five years in California, a free State, and that's all you've toted out of it—a dead body ! There now, don't sit there and swing yo' hat under that chyar, but rouse out and come along with me to the pawty if you can shake a foot, and show Miss Pinkney and the gyrls yo' fit for something mo' than to skirmish round as a black japanned spittoon for Julia Jeffcourt !” It is not recorded that Corbin accepted this cheerful invitation, but for a few days afterwards he was more darkly observant of, and respectful to, Miss Sally. Strange indeed if he had not noticed, although always in his resigned fashion, the dull green stagnation of the life around him, or when not accepting it as part of his trouble, he had not chafed at the arrested youth and senile childishness of the people. Stranger still if he had not at times been startled to hear the outgrown superstitions and follies of his youth voiced again by grown-up men, and perhaps strangest of all if he had not vaguely accepted it all as the hereditary curse of that barbarism under which he himself had survived and suffered.

The reconciliation between himself and Mrs. Jeffcourt was superficially effected, so far as a daily visit by him to the house indicated it to the community, but it was also known that Julia was invariably absent on these occasions.

What happened at those interviews did not transpire, but it may be surmised that Mrs. Jeffcourt, perhaps recognising the fact that Corbin was really giving her all that he had to give, or possibly having some lurking fear of Colonel Starbottle, was so far placated as to exhibit only the average ingratitude of her species towards a regular benefactor. She consented to the erection of a small obelisk over her son's grave, and permitted Corbin to plant a few flowering shrubs, which he daily visited and took care of. It is said that on one of these pilgrimages he encountered Miss Julia—apparently on the same errand—who haughtily retired. It was further alleged, on the authority of one of Mammy Judy's little niggers, that those two black mourning figures had been seen at nightfall sitting opposite to each other at the head and foot of the grave, and "glowerin'" at one another "like two hants." But when it was asserted on the same authority that their voices had been later overheard uplifted in some vehement discussion over the grave of the impassive dead, great curiosity was aroused. Being pressed by the eager Miss Sally to repeat some words or any words he had heard them say, the little witness glibly replied, "Marse Linkum" (Lincoln) and "The Souf," and so, for the time, shipwrecked his testimony. But it was recalled six months afterwards. It was then that a pleasant spring day brought madness and enthusiasm to a majority of Pineville, and bated breath and awe to a few, and it was known with the tidings that the South had appealed to arms that among those who had first responded to the call was Joseph Corbin, an alleged "Union man," who had, however, volunteered to take that place in her ranks which might *have been filled by the man he had killed*. And then people forgot all about him.

outlines of home and garden and landscape. But seen now, in the choking breathlessness of haste, in the fitful changing flashes of life and motion around it, in intervals of sharp suspense or dazed bewilderment, it seemed to be recognised no longer. Men who had known it all their lives, hurrying to the front in compact masses, scurrying to the rear in straggling line, or opening their ranks to let artillery gallop by, stared at it vaguely, and clattered or scrambled on again. The smoke of a masked battery in the woods struggled and writhed to free itself from the clinging treetops behind it, and sank back into a grey encompassing cloud. The dust thrown up by a column of passing horse poured over the wall in one long wave, and whitened the garden with its ashes. Throughout the dim empty house one no longer heard the sound of cannon, only a dull intermittent concussion was felt, silently bringing flakes of plaster from the walls, or sliding fragments of glass from the shattered windows. A shell, lifted from the ominous distance, hung uncertain in the air and then descended swiftly through the roof; the whole house dilated with flame for an instant, smoke rolled slowly from the windows, and even the desolate chimneys started into a hideous mockery of life, and then all was still again. At such awful intervals the sun shone out brightly, touched the green of the still sleeping woods and the red and white of a flower in the garden, and something in a grey uniform writhed out of the dust of the road, staggered to the wall, and died.

A mile down this road, growing more and more obscure with those rising and falling apparitions or the shapeless and rugged heaps terrible in their helpless inertia by hedge and fence, arose the cemetery hill. Taken and retaken thrice that afternoon, the dead above it far outnumbered the dead below; and when at last the tide of battle swept around its

base into the dull, reverberating woods, and it emerged from the smoke, silenced and abandoned, only a few stragglers remained. One of them, leaning on his musket, was still gloomily facing the woods.

"Joseph Corbin," said a low, hurried voice.

He started and glanced quickly at the tombs around him. Perhaps it was because he had been thinking of the dead—but the voice sounded like *his*. Yet it was only the *sister*, who had glided, pale and haggard, from the thicket.

"They are coming through the woods," she said quickly. "Run, or you'll be taken. Why do you linger?"

"You know why," he said gloomily.

"Yes, but you have done yo' duty. You have done his work. The task is finished now, and yo' free."

He did not reply, but remained gazing at the woods.

"Joseph," she said more gently, laying her trembling hand on his arm, "Joseph, fly—and—take me with you. For I was wrong, and I want you to forgive me. I knew your heart was not in this, and I ought not to have asked you. Joseph—listen! I never wanted to avenge myself nor *him* when I spat on your face. I wanted to avenge myself on *her*. I hated her, because I thought she wanted to work upon you and use you for herself."

"Your mother," he said, looking at her.

"No," she said, with widely opened eyes; "you know who I mean—Miss Sally."

He looked at her wonderingly for a moment, but quickly bent his head again in the direction of the road. "They are coming," he said, starting. "*You* must go. This is no place for you. Stop! it's too late; you cannot go now until they have passed. Come here—crouch down here—over this grave—so."

He almost forced her—kneeling down—upon the mound below the level of the shrubs, and then ran quickly himself

a few paces lower down the hill to a more exposed position. She understood it. He wished to attract attention to himself. He was successful—a few hurried shots followed from the road, but struck above him.

He clambered back quickly to where she was still crouching.

“They were the vedettes,” he said; “but they have fallen back on the main skirmish line, and will be here in force in a moment. Go—while you can.” She had not moved. He tried to raise her—her hat fell off—he saw blood oozing from where the vedette’s bullet that had missed him had pierced her brain.

And yet he saw in that pale dead face only the other face which he remembered now had been turned like this towards his own. It was very strange. And this was the end, and this was his expiation! He raised his own face humbly, blindly, despairingly to the inscrutable sky; it looked back upon him from above as coldly as the dead face had from below.

Yet out of this he struck a faint idea that he voiced aloud in nearly the same words which he had used to Colonel Starbottle only three years ago. “It was with his own pistol too,” he said, and took up his musket.

He walked deliberately down the hill, occasionally trying the stock of his musket in the loose earth, and at last suddenly remained motionless, in the attitude of leaning over it. At the same moment there was a distant shout; two thin parallel streams of blue and steel came issuing through the woods like a river, appeared to join tumultuously in the open before the hill, and out of the tumult a mounted officer called upon him to surrender.

He did not reply.

“Come down from there, Johnny Reb; I want to speak to you,” called a young corporal.

He did not move.

"It's time to go home, Johnny."

No response.

The officer, who had been holding down his men with an unsworded but masterful hand, raised it suddenly. A dozen shots followed. The men leaped forward, and dashing Corbin contemptuously aside, streamed up the hill past him.

But he had neither heard nor cared. For they found he had already deliberately transfixed himself through the heart on his own bayonet.

The Postmistress of Laurel Run.

CHAPTER I.

THE mail stage had just passed Laurel Run. So rapidly that the whirling cloud of dust dragged with it down the steep grade from the summit hung over the level long after the stage had vanished, and then, drifting away, slowly sifted a red precipitate over the hot platform of the Laurel Run post-office.

Out of this cloud presently emerged the neat figure of the Postmistress with the mail bag, which had been dexterously flung at her feet from the top of the passing vehicle. A dozen loungers eagerly stretched out their hands to assist her, but the warning, "It's agin the rules, boys, for any but her to touch it," from a bystander, and a coquettish shake of the head from the Postmistress herself—much more effective than any official interdict—withheld them. The bag was not heavy—Laurel Run was too recent a settlement to have attracted much correspondence—and the young woman, having pounced upon her prey with a certain feline instinct, dragged it, not without difficulty, behind the partitioned enclosure in the office, and locked the door. Her pretty face, momentarily visible through the window, was slightly flushed with the exertion, and the loose ends of her fair hair, wet with perspiration, curled themselves over her forehead into tantalising little rings. But the window shutter was quickly closed, and this momentary but charming vision withdrawn from the waiting public.

"Guv'ment oughter have more sense than to make a woman pick mail bags outer the road," said Jo Simmons sympathetically. "'Tain't in her day's work anyhow; Guv'ment oughter hand 'em over to her like a lady; it's rich enough and ugly enough."

"'Tain't Guv'ment; it's that Stage Company's airs and graces," interrupted a newcomer. "They think it mighty fine to go beltin' by, makin' everybody take their dust—just because *stoppin'* ain't in their contract. Why, if that express-man who chucked down the bag had any feelin's for a lady——" but he stopped here at the amused faces of his auditors.

"Guess you don't know much o' that express-man's feelin's, stranger," said Simmons grimly. "Why, you oughter see him just nussin' that bag like a baby as he comes tearin' down the grade, and then rise up and sorter heave it to Mrs. Baker ez if it was a five-dollar bokay! His feelin's for her! Why, he's give himself so dead away to her that we're looking for him to forget what he's doin' next, and just come sailin' down hisself at her feet."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the partition, Mrs. Baker had brushed the red dust from the padlocked bag, and removed what seemed to be a supplementary package attached to it by a wire. Opening it, she found a handsome scent-bottle, evidently a superadded gift from the devoted express-man. This she put aside with a slight smile and the murmured word, "Foolishness." But when she had unlocked the bag, even its sacred interior was also profaned by a covert parcel from the adjacent Postmaster at Burnt Ridge, containing a gold "specimen" brooch and some circus tickets. It was laid aside with the other. This also was vanity and—presumably—vexation of spirit.

There were seventeen letters in all, of which five were for herself—and yet the proportion was small that morning.

Two of them were marked "Official business," and were promptly put by with feminine discernment, but in another compartment than that holding the presents. Then the shutter was opened, and the task of delivery commenced.

It was accompanied with a social peculiarity that had in time become a habit of Laurel Run. As the young woman delivered the letters, in turn, to the men who were patiently drawn up in Indian file, she made that simple act a medium of privileged but limited conversation on special or general topics—gay or serious as the case might be, or the temperament of the man suggested. That it was almost always of a complimentary character on their part may be readily imagined; but it was invariably characterised by an element of refined restraint, and, whether from some implied understanding or individual sense of honour, it never passed the bounds of conventionality or a certain delicacy of respect. The delivery was consequently more or less protracted, but when each man had exchanged his three or four minutes' conversation with the fair Postmistress—a conversation at times impeded by bashfulness or timidity, on his part solely, or restricted often to vague smiling—he resignedly made way for the next. It was a formal levée, mitigated by the informality of rustic tact, great good-humour, and infinite patience, and would have been amusing had it not always been terribly in earnest and at times touching. For it was peculiar to the place and the epoch, and indeed implied the whole history of Mrs. Baker.

She was the wife of John Baker, foreman of "The Last Chance," now for a year lying dead under half a mile of crushed and beaten-in tunnel at Burnt Ridge. There had been a sudden outcry from the depths at high hot noontide one day, and John had rushed from his cabin—his young, foolish, flirting wife clinging to him—to answer that despair-

ing cry of his imprisoned men. There was one exit that he alone knew which might be yet held open, among falling walls and tottering timbers, long enough to set them free. For one moment only the strong man hesitated between her entreating arms and his brothers' despairing cry. But she rose suddenly with a pale face, and said, "Go, John; I will wait for you here." He went, the men were freed—but she had waited for him ever since!

Yet in the shock of the calamity and in the after struggles of that poverty which had come to the ruined camp, she had scarcely changed. But the men had. Although she was to all appearances the same giddy, pretty Betsy Baker, who had been so disturbing to the younger members, they seemed to be no longer disturbed by her. A certain subdued awe and respect, as if the martyred spirit of John Baker still held his arm around her, appeared to have come upon them all. They held their breath as this pretty woman, whose brief mourning had not seemed to affect her cheerfulness or even playfulness of spirit, passed before them. But she stood by her cabin and the camp—the only woman in a settlement of forty men—during the darkest hours of their fortune. Helping them to wash and cook, and ministering to their domestic needs, the sanctity of her cabin was, however, always kept as inviolable as if it had been *his* tomb. No one exactly knew why, for it was only a tacit instinct; but even one or two who had not scrupled to pay court to Betsy Baker during John Baker's life shrank from even a suggestion of familiarity towards the woman who had said that she would "wait for him there."

When brighter days came, and the settlement had increased by one or two families, and laggard capital had been hurried up to relieve the still beleaguered and locked-up wealth of Burnt Ridge, the needs of the community and

the claims of the widow of John Baker were so well told in political quarters that the post-office of Laurel Run was created expressly for her. Every man participated in the building of the pretty yet substantial edifice—the only public building of Laurel Run—that stood in the dust of the great highway, half a mile from the settlement. There she was installed for certain hours of the day, for she could not be prevailed upon to abandon John's cabin, and here, with all the added respect due to a public functionary, she was secure in her privacy.

But the blind devotion of Laurel Run to John Baker's relict did not stop here. In its zeal to assure the Government authorities of the necessity for a post-office, and to secure a permanent competency to the Postmistress, there was much embarrassing extravagance. During the first week the sale of stamps at Laurel Run Post-office was unprecedented in the annals of the Department. Fancy prices were given for the first issue ; then they were bought wildly, recklessly, unprofitably, and on all occasions. Complimentary congratulation at the little window invariably ended with "and a dollar's worth of stamps, Mrs. Baker." It was felt to be supremely delicate to buy only the highest-priced stamps, without reference to their adequacy ; then mere *quantity* was sought ; then outgoing letters were all overpaid and stamped in outrageous proportion to their weight and even size. The imbecility of this, and its probable effect on the reputation of Laurel Run at the General Post-office, being pointed out by Mrs. Baker, stamps were adopted as local currency, and even for decorative purposes on mirrors and the walls of cabins. Everybody wrote letters, with the result, however, that those *sent* were ludicrously and suspiciously in excess of those received. To obviate this, select parties made forced journeys to Hickory Hill, the next post-office, with letters and circulars addressed to

themselves at Laurel Run. How long the extravagance would have continued is not known, but it was not until it was rumoured that, in consequence of this excessive flow of business, the Department had concluded that a post-master would be better fitted for the place that it abated, and a compromise was effected with the General Office by a permanent salary to the Postmistress.

Such was the history of Mrs. Baker, who had just finished her afternoon levée, nodded a smiling "good-bye" to her last customer, and closed her shutter again. Then she took up her own letters, but, before reading them, glanced, with a pretty impatience, at the two official envelopes addressed to herself, which she had shelved. They were generally a "lot of new rules," or notifications, or "absurd" questions which had nothing to do with Laurel Run and only bothered her and "made her head ache," and she had usually referred them to her admiring neighbour at Hickory Hill for explanation, who had generally returned them to her with the brief endorsement, "Purp stuff, don't bother," or, "Hog wash, let it slide." She remembered now that he had not returned the last two. With knitted brows and a slight pout she put aside her private correspondence and tore open the first one. It referred with official curtness to an unanswered communication of the previous week, and was "compelled to remind her of rule 47." Again those horrid rules! She opened the other; the frown deepened on her brow, and became fixed.

It was a summary of certain valuable money letters that had miscarried on the route, and of which they had given her previous information. For a moment her cheeks blazed. How dare they; what did they mean! Her waybills and register were always right; she knew the names of every man, woman, and child in her district; no such names as those borne by the missing letters had ever existed at Laurel

Run; no such addresses had ever been sent from Laurel Run Post-office. It was a mean insinuation! She would send in her resignation at once! She would get "the boys" to write an insulting letter to Senator Slocumb—Mrs. Baker had the feminine idea of Government as a purely personal institution—and she would find out who it was that had put them up to this prying, crawling impudence! It was probably that wall-eyed old wife of the Postmaster at Heavy Tree Crossing, who was jealous of her. "Remind her of their previous unanswered communication," indeed! Where was that communication, anyway? She remembered she had sent it to her admirer at Hickory Hill. Odd that he hadn't answered it. Of course, he knew all about this meanness—could he, too, have dared to suspect her! The thought turned her crimson again. He, Stanton Green, was an old "Laurel Runner," a friend of John's, a little "triflin'" and "presoomin'," but still an old loyal pioneer of the camp! "Why hadn't he spoke up?"

There was the soft, muffled fall of a horse's hoof in the thick dust of the highway, the jingle of dismounting spurs, and a firm tread on the platform. No doubt one of the boys returning for a few supplemental remarks under the feeble pretence of forgotten stamps. It had been done before, and she had resented it as "cayotin' round"; but now she was eager to pour out her wrongs to the first comer. She had her hand impulsively on the door of the partition, when she stopped with a new sense of her impaired dignity. Could she confess this to her worshippers? But here the door opened in her very face, and a stranger entered.

He was a man of fifty, compactly and strongly built. A squarely-cut goatee, slightly streaked with grey, fell straight from his thin-lipped but handsome mouth; his eyes were dark, humorous, yet searching. But the distinctive quality that struck Mrs. Baker was the blending of urban ease with

frontier frankness. He was evidently a man who had seen cities and knew countries as well. And while he was dressed with the comfortable simplicity of a Californian mounted traveller, her inexperienced but feminine eye detected the keynote of his respectability in the carefully-tied bow of his cravat. The Sierrean throat was apt to be open, free, and unfettered.

"Good morning, Mrs. Baker," he said pleasantly, with his hat already in his hand. "I'm Harry Home, of San Francisco." As he spoke his eye swept approvingly over the neat enclosure, the primly-tied papers, and well-kept pigeon-holes; the pot of flowers on her desk; her China silk mantle, and killing little chip hat and ribbons hanging against the wall; thence to her own pink, flushed face, bright blue eyes, tendrilled clinging hair, and then—fell upon the leathern mail bag still lying across the table. Here it became fixed on the unfortunate wire of the amorous express-man that yet remained hanging from the brass wards of the lock, and he reached his hand toward it.

But little Mrs. Baker was before him, and had seized it in her arms. She had been too pre-occupied and bewildered to resent his first intrusion behind the partition, but this last familiarity with her sacred official property—albeit empty—capped the climax of her wrongs.

"How dare you touch it!" she said indignantly. "How dare you come in here! Who are you, anyway? Go outside at once!"

The stranger fell back, with an amused, deprecatory gesture, and a long, silent laugh. "I'm afraid you don't know me, after all!" he said pleasantly. "I'm Harry Home, the Department Agent from the San Francisco office. My note of advice, No. 201, with my name on the envelope, seems to have miscarried too."

Even in her fright and astonishment it flashed upon Mrs.

Baker that she had sent that notice, too, to Hickory Hill. But with it all the feminine secretive instinct within her was now thoroughly aroused, and she kept silent.

"I ought to have explained," he went on smilingly; "but you are quite right, Mrs. Baker," he added, nodding towards the bag. "As far as you knew, I had no business to go near it. Glad to see you know how to defend Uncle Sam's property so well. I was only a bit puzzled to know" (pointing to the wire) "if that thing was on the bag when it was delivered to you?"

Mrs. Baker saw no reason to conceal the truth. After all, this official was a man like the others, and it was just as well that he should understand her power. "It's only the express-man's foolishness," she said, with a slightly coquettish toss of her head. "He thinks it smart to tie some nonsense on that bag with the wire when he flings it down."

Mr. Home, with his eyes on her pretty face, seemed to think it a not inhuman or unpardonable folly. "As long as he doesn't meddle with the inside of the bag, I suppose you must put up with it," he said laughingly. A dreadful recollection that the Hickory Hill Postmaster had used the inside of the bag to convey *his* foolishness, came across her. It would never do to confess it now. Her face must have shown some agitation, for the official resumed with a half-paternal, half-reassuring air, "But enough of this. Now, Mrs. Baker, to come to my business here. Briefly, then, it doesn't concern you in the least, except so far as it may relieve you and some others, whom the Department knows equally well, from a certain responsibility, and, perhaps, anxiety. We are pretty well posted down here in all that concerns Laurel Run, and I think" (with a slight bow), "we've known all about you and John Baker. My only business here is to take your place to-night in receiving the

‘Omnibus Way Bag,’ that you know arrives here at 9.30, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, sir,” said Mrs. Baker hurriedly; “but it never has anything for us, except——” (she caught herself up quickly, with a stammer, as she remembered the sighing Green’s occasional offerings), “except a notification from Hickory Hill Post-office. It leaves there,” she went on, with an affectation of precision, “at half-past eight exactly, and it’s about an hour’s run—seven miles by road.”

“Exactly,” said Mr. Home. “Well, *I* will receive the bag, open it, and despatch it again. You can, if you choose, take a holiday.”

“But,” said Mrs. Baker, as she remembered that Laurel Run always made a point of attending her evening levée on account of the superior leisure it offered, “there are the people who come for letters, you know.”

“I thought you said there were no letters at that time,” said Mr. Home quickly.

“No—but—but——” (with a slight hysterical stammer) “the boys come all the same.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Home dryly.

“And—O Lord!—” But here the spectacle of the possible discomfiture of Laurel Run at meeting the bearded face of Mr. Home, instead of her own smooth cheeks, at the window, combined with her nervous excitement, overcame her so that, throwing her little frilled apron over her head, she gave way to a paroxysm of hysterical laughter. Mr. Home waited with amused toleration for it to stop, and when she had recovered, resumed. “Now, I should like to refer an instant to my first communication to you. Have you got it handy?”

Mrs. Baker’s face fell. “No; I sent it over to Mr. Green, of Hickory Hill, for information.”

"What!"

Terrified at the sudden seriousness of the man's voice, she managed to gasp out, however, that, after her usual habit, she had not opened the official letters, but had sent them to her more experienced colleague for advice and information; that she never could understand them herself—they made her head ache, and interfered with her other duties—but *he* understood them, and sent her word what to do. Remembering also his usual style of endorsement, she grew red again.

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing; he didn't return them."

"Naturally," said Mr. Home, with a peculiar expression. After a few moments' silent stroking of his beard, he suddenly faced the frightened woman.

"You oblige me, Mrs. Baker, to speak more frankly to you than I had intended. You have—unwittingly, I believe—given information to a man whom the Government suspects of peculation. You have, without knowing it, warned the Postmaster at Hickory Hill that he is suspected; and, as you might have frustrated our plans for tracing a series of embezzlements to their proper source, you will see that you might have also done great wrong to yourself as his only neighbour and the next responsible person. In plain words, we have traced the disappearance of money letters to a point when it lies between these two offices. Now, I have not the least hesitation in telling you that we do not suspect Laurel Run, and never have suspected it. Even the result of your thoughtless act, although it warned him, confirms our suspicion of his guilt. As to the warning, it has failed, or he has grown reckless, for another letter has been missed since. To-night, however, will settle all doubt in the matter. When I open that bag in this office to-night, and do not find a certain decoy letter in it, which was last checked at

Heavy Tree Crossing, I shall know that it remains in Green's possession at Hickory Hill."

She was sitting back in her chair, white and breathless. He glanced at her kindly, and then took up his hat. "Come, Mrs. Baker; don't let this worry you. As I told you at first, *you* have nothing to fear. Even your thoughtlessness and ignorance of rules have contributed to show your own innocence. Nobody will ever be the wiser for this; we do not advertise our affairs in the Department. Not a soul but yourself knows the real cause of my visit here. I will leave you here alone for a while, so as to divert any suspicion. You will come as usual, this evening, and be seen by your friends; I will only be here when the bag arrives, to open it. Good-bye, Mrs. Baker; it's a nasty bit of business, but it's all in the day's work. I've seen worse, and, thank God, you're out of it."

She heard his footsteps retreat into the outer office and die out of the platform; the jingle of his spurs, and the hollow beat of his horsehoofs, that seemed to find a dull echo in her own heart, and she was alone.

The room was very hot and very quiet; she could hear the warping and creaking of the shingles under the relaxing of the nearly level sunbeams. The office clock struck seven. In the breathless silence that followed, a woodpecker took up his interrupted work on the roof, and seemed to beat out monotonously on her ear the last words of the stranger: Stanton Green—a thief! Stanton Green, one of the "boys" John had helped out of the falling tunnel! Stanton Green, whose old mother in the States still wrote letters to him at Laurel Run, in a few hours to be a disgraced and ruined man for ever! She remembered now, as a thoughtless woman remembers, tales of his extravagance and fast living, of which she had taken no heed, and, with a sense of shame, of presents sent her, that she

now clearly saw must have been far beyond his means. What would the boys say? What would John have said? Ah! what would John have *done*!

She started suddenly to her feet, white and cold as on that day that she had parted from John Baker before the tunnel. She put on her hat and mantle, and going to that little iron safe that stood in the corner, unlocked it and took out its entire contents of gold and silver. She had reached the door when another idea seized her, and opening her desk, she collected her stamps to the last sheet, and hurriedly rolled them up under her cape. Then with a glance at the clock, and a rapid survey of the road from the platform, she slipped from it, and seemed to be swallowed up in the waiting woods beyond.

CHAPTER II.

ONCE within the friendly shadows of the long belt of pines, Mrs. Baker kept them until she had left the limited settlement of Laurel Run far to the right, and came upon an open slope of Burnt Ridge, where she knew Jo Simmons' mustang, Blue Lightning, would be quietly feeding. She had often ridden him before, and when she had detached the fifty-foot riata from his head-stall, he permitted her the further recognised familiarity of twining her fingers in his bluish mane and climbing on his back. The tool-shed of Burnt Ridge Tunnel, where Jo's saddle and bridle always hung, was but a canter farther on. She reached it unperceived, and—another trick of the old days—quickly extemporised a side-saddle from Simmons' Mexican tree, with its high cantle and horn bow, and the aid of a blanket. Then leaping to her seat, she rapidly threw off her mantle, tied it by its sleeves around her waist, tucked it under one

knee, and let it fall over her horse's flanks. By this time Blue Lightning was also struck with a flash of equine recollection, and pricked up his ears. Mrs. Baker uttered a little chirping cry which he remembered, and the next moment they were both careering over the Ridge.

The trail that she had taken, though precipitate, difficult, and dangerous in places, was a clear gain of two miles on the stage road. There was less chance of her being followed or meeting any one. The greater cañons were already in shadow; the pines on the farther ridges were separating their masses, and showing individual silhouettes against the sky, but the air was still warm, and the cool breath of night, as she well knew it, had not yet begun to flow down the mountain. The lower range of Burnt Ridge was still un eclipsed by the creeping shadow of the mountain ahead of her. Without a watch, but with this familiar and slowly changing dial spread out before her, she knew the time to a minute. Heavy Tree Hill, a lesser height in the distance, was already wiped out by that shadowy index finger—half-past seven! The stage would be at Hickory Hill just before half-past eight; she ought to anticipate it, if possible—it would stay ten minutes to change horses—she *must* arrive before it left!

There was a good two-mile level before the rise of the next range. Now, Blue Lightning! all you know! And that was much—for with the little chip hat and fluttering ribbons well bent down over the bluish mane, and the streaming gauze of her mantle almost level with the horse's back, she swept down across the long tableland like a skimming blue jay. A few more bird-like dips up and down the undulations, and then came the long, cruel ascent of the Divide.

Acrid with perspiration, caking with dust, slithering in the slippery, impalpable powder of the road, groggily stagger-

ing in a red dusty dream, coughing, snorting, head-tossing; becoming suddenly dejected, with slouching haunch and limp legs on easy slopes, or wildly spasmodic and agile on sharp acclivities, Blue Lightning began to have ideas and recollections! Ah! she was a devil for a lark—this lightly-clinging, caressing, blarneying, cooing creature—up there! He remembered her now. Ha! very well then. Hoop-la! And suddenly leaping out like a rabbit, bucking, trotting hard, ambling lightly, “loping” on three legs and recreating himself—as only a Californian mustang could—the invincible Blue Lightning at last stood triumphantly upon the summit. The evening star had just pricked itself through the golden mist of the horizon line—eight o’clock! She could do it now! But here suddenly her first hesitation seized her. She knew her horse, she knew the trail, she knew herself—but did she know *the man* to whom she was riding? A cold chill crept over her, and then she shivered in a sudden blast; it was night at last swooping down from the now invisible Sierras, and possessing all it touched. But it was only one long descent to Hickory Hill now, and she swept down securely on its wings. Half-past eight! The lights of the settlement were just ahead of her—but so, too, were the two lamps of the waiting stage before the post-office and hotel.

Happily the lounging crowd were gathered around the hotel, and she slipped into the post-office from the rear, unperceived. As she stepped behind the partition, its only occupant—a good-looking young fellow with a reddish moustache—turned towards her with a flush of delighted surprise. But it changed at the sight of the white, determined face and the brilliant eyes that had never looked once towards him, but were fixed upon a large bag, whose yawning mouth was still open and propped up beside his desk.

"Where is the through money-letter that came in that bag?" she said quickly.

"What—do—you—mean?" he stammered, with a face that had suddenly grown whiter than her own.

"I mean that it's a *decoy*, checked at Heavy Tree Crossing, and that Mr. Home, of San Francisco, is now waiting at my office to know if you have taken it!"

The laugh and lie that he had at first tried to summon to mouth and lips never reached them. For, under the spell of her rigid, ruthless face, he turned almost mechanically to his desk and took out a package.

"Good God! you've opened it already!" she cried, pointing to the broken seal.

The expression on her face, more than anything she had said, convinced him that she knew all. He stammered under the new alarm that her despairing tone suggested. "Yes!—I was owing some bills—the collector was waiting here for the money, and I took something from the packet. But I was going to make it up by next mail—I swear it."

"How much have you taken?"

"Only a trifle. I——"

"How much?"

"A hundred dollars!"

She dragged the money she had brought from Laurel Run from her pocket, and counting out the sum, replaced it in the open package. He ran quickly to get the sealing-wax, but she motioned him away as she dropped the package back into the mail bag. "No; as long as the money is found in the bag the package may have been broken *accidentally*. Now burst open one or two of those other packages a little—so;" she took out a packet of letters and bruised their official wrappings under her little foot until the tape fastening was loosened. "Now give

me something heavy." She caught up a brass two-pound weight, and in the same feverish but collected haste wrapped it in paper, sealed it, stamped it, and, addressing it in a large printed hand to herself at Laurel Run, dropped it in the bag. Then she closed it and locked it; he would have assisted her, but she again waved him away. "Send for the express-man, and keep yourself out of the way for a moment," she said curtly.

An attitude of weak admiration and foolish passion had taken the place of his former tremulous fear. He obeyed excitedly, but without a word. Mrs. Baker wiped her moist forehead and parched lips, and shook out her skirt. Well might the young express-man start at the unexpected revelation of those sparkling eyes and that demurely smiling mouth at the little window.

"Mrs. Baker!"

She put her finger quickly to her lips, and threw a world of unutterable and enigmatical meaning into her mischievous face.

"There's a big San Francisco swell takin' my place at Laurel to-night, Charley."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And it's a pity that the omnibus way-bag happened to get such a shaking up and banging round already, coming here."

"Eh?"

"I say," continued Mrs. Baker, with great gravity and dancing eyes, "that it would be just *awful* if that keefer City clerk found things kinder mixed up inside when he comes to open it. I wouldn't give him trouble for the world, Charley."

"No, ma'am, it ain't like you."

"So you'll be particularly careful on *my* account."

"Mrs. Baker," said Charley, with infinite gravity, "if

that bag *should tumble off a dozen times* between this and Laurel Run, I'll hop down and pick it up myself."

"Thank you! shake!"

They shook hands gravely across the window-ledge.

"And you ain't going down with us, Mrs. Baker?"

"Of course not; it wouldn't do—for *I ain't here*—don't you see?"

"Of course!"

She handed him the bag through the door. He took it carefully, but in spite of his great precaution fell over it twice on his way to the road, where from certain exclamations and shouts it seemed that a like miserable mischance attended its elevation to the boot. Then Mrs. Baker came back into the office, and, as the wheels rolled away, threw herself into a chair and inconsistently gave way for the first time to an outburst of tears. Then her hand was grasped suddenly, and she found Green on his knees before her. She started to her feet.

"Don't move," he said, with weak hysteric passion, "but listen to me, for God's sake! I am ruined, I know, even though you have just saved me from detection and disgrace. I have been mad!—a fool, to do what I have done, I know, but you do not know all—you do not know why I did it—you cannot think of the temptation that has driven me to it. Listen, Mrs. Baker. I have been striving to get money, honestly, dishonestly—any way, to look well in *your* eyes—to make myself worthy of you—to make myself rich, and to be able to offer you a home and take you away from Laurel Run. It was all for *you*—it was all for love of *you*, Betsy, my darling. Listen to me!"

In the fury, outraged sensibility, indignation, and infinite disgust that filled her little body at that moment, she should have been large, imperious, goddess-like, and commanding. But God is at times ironical with suffering womanhood. She

could only writhe her hand from his grasp with childish contortions ; she could only glare at him with eyes that were prettily and piquantly brilliant ; she could only slap at his detaining hand with a plump and velvety palm, and when she found her voice it was high falsetto. And all she could say was, "Leave me be, looney, or I'll scream !"

He rose, with a weak, confused laugh, half of miserable affectation and half of real anger and shame.

"What did you come riding over here for, then ? What did you take all this risk for ? Why did you rush over here to share my disgrace—for *you* are as much mixed up with this now as *I* am—if you didn't calculate to share *everything else* with me ? What did you come here for, then, if not for *me* ?"

"What did *I* come here for ?" said Mrs. Baker, with every drop of red blood gone from her cheek and trembling lip. "What—did—I—come here for ? Well ! I came here for *John Baker's* sake ! John Baker, who stood between you and death at Burnt Ridge, as I stand between you and damnation at Laurel Run, Mr. Green ! Yes, John Baker, lying under half of Burnt Ridge, but more to me this day than any living man crawling over it—in—in"—oh, fatal climax !—"in a month o' Sundays ! What did I come here for ? I came here as John Baker's livin' wife to carry on dead John Baker's work. Yes, dirty work this time, maybe, Mr. Green ! but his work and for *him* only—precious ! That's what I came here for ; that's what I *live* for ; that's what I'm waiting for—to be up to *him* and his work always. That's me—Betsy Baker !"

She walked up and down rapidly, tying her chip hat under her chin again. Then she stopped, and taking her chamois purse from her pocket, laid it sharply on the desk.

"Stanton Green, don't be a fool ! Rise up out of this, and be a man again. Take enough out o' that bag to pay

what you owe Gov'ment, send in your resignation, and keep the rest to start you in an honest life elsewhere. But light out o' Hickory Hill afore this time to-morrow."

She pulled her mantle from the wall and opened the door.

"You are going?" he said bitterly.

"Yes." Either she could not hold seriousness long in her capricious little fancy, or, with feminine tact, she sought to make the parting less difficult for him, for she broke into a dazzling smile. "Yes, I'm goin' to run Blue Lightning agin Charley and that way-bag back to Laurel Run, and break the record."

It is said that she did! Perhaps owing to the fact that the grade of the return journey to Laurel Run was in her favour, and that she could avoid the long, circuitous ascent to the summit taken by the stage, or that, owing to the extraordinary difficulties in the carriage of the way-bag—which had to be twice rescued from under the wheels of the stage—she entered the Laurel Run post-office as the coach leaders came trotting up the hill. Mr. Home was already on the platform.

"You'll have to ballast your next way-bag, boss," said Charley gravely, as it escaped his clutches once more in the dust of the road, "or you'll have to make a new contract with the company. We've lost ten minutes in five miles over that bucking thing."

Home did not reply, but quickly dragged his prize into the office, scarcely noticing Mrs. Baker, who stood beside him pale and breathless. As the bolt of the bag was drawn, revealing its chaotic interior, Mrs. Baker gave a little sigh. Home glanced quickly at her, emptied the bag upon the floor, and picked up the broken and half-filled money parcel. Then he collected the scattered coins and counted them.

"It's all right, Mrs. Baker," he said gravely. "*He's* safe this time."

"I'm so glad!" said little Mrs. Baker, with a hypocritical gasp.

"So am I," returned Home, with increasing gravity, as he took the coin, "for, from all I have gathered this afternoon, it seems he was an old pioneer of Laurel Run, a friend of your husband's, and, I think, more fool than knave!" He was silent for a moment, clicking the coins against each other; then he said carelessly, "Did he get quite away, Mrs. Baker?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about," said Mrs. Baker with a lofty air of dignity, but a somewhat debasing colour. "I don't see why *I* should know anything about it, or why he should go away at all."

"Well," said Mr. Home, laying his hand gently on the widow's shoulder, "well, you see, it might have occurred to his friends that the *coins were marked*! That is, no doubt, the reason why he would take their good advice and go. But, as I said before, Mrs. Baker, *you're* all right, whatever happens—the Government stands by *you*!"

A Night at "Hays."

CHAPTER I.

It was difficult to say if Hays' farmhouse or "Hays," as it was familiarly called, looked any more bleak and cheerless that winter afternoon than it usually did in the strong summer sunshine. Painted a cold merciless white, with scant projections for shadows, a roof of white-pine shingles, bleached lighter through sun and wind, and covered with low, white-capped chimneys, it looked even more stark and chilly than the drifts which had climbed its low roadside fence, and yet seemed hopeless of gaining a foothold on the glancing walls, or slippery, wind-swept roof. The storm, which had already heaped the hollows of the road with snow, hurled its finely-granulated flakes against the building, but they were whirled along the gutters and ridges, and disappeared in smoke-like puffs across the icy roof. The granite outcrop in the hilly field beyond had long ago whitened and vanished; the dwarf-firs and larches, which had at first taken uncouth shapes in the drift, blended vaguely together, and then merged into an unbroken formless wave. But the gaunt angles and rigid outlines of the building remained sharp and unchanged. It would seem as if the rigours of winter had only accented their hardness, as the fierceness of summer had previously made them intolerable.

It was believed that some of this unyielding grimness

attached to Hays himself. Certain it is that neither hardship nor prosperity had touched his character. Years ago his emigrant team had broken down in this wild but wooded defile of the Sierras, and he had been forced to a winter encampment, with only a rude log-cabin for shelter, on the very verge of the promised land. Unable to enter it himself, he was nevertheless able to assist the better-equipped teams that followed him with wood and water and a coarse forage gathered from a sheltered slope of wild oats. This was the beginning of a rude "supply station," which afterwards became so profitable that when spring came, and Hays' team were sufficiently recruited to follow the flood of immigrating gold-seekers to the placers and valleys, there seemed no occasion for it. His fortune had been already found in the belt of arable slope behind the wooded defile, and in the miraculously located coign of vantage on what was now the great highway of travel and the only oasis and first relief of the weary journey; the breaking down of his own team at that spot had not only been the salvation of those who found at "Hays" the means of prosecuting the last part of their pilgrimage, but later provided the equipment of returning teams.

The first two years of this experience had not been without hardship and danger. He had been raided by Indians and besieged for three days in his stockaded cabin; he had been invested by wintry drifts of twenty feet of snow, cut off equally from incoming teams from the pass and the valley below. During the second year his wife had joined him with four children, but whether the enforced separation had dulled her conjugal affection, or whether she was tempted by a natural feminine longing for the land of promise beyond, she sought it one morning with a fascinating teamster, leaving her two sons and two daughters behind her; two years later the elder of the daughters followed the mother's example,

with such maidenly discretion, however, as to forbear compromising herself by any previous matrimonial formality whatever. From that day Hays had no further personal intercourse with the valley below. He put up an hotel a mile away from the farmhouse, that he might not have to dispense hospitality to his customers, nor accept their near companionship. Always a severe Presbyterian, and an uncompromising deacon of a far-scattered and scanty community who occasionally held their service in one of his barns, he grew more rigid, sectarian, and narrow day by day. He was feared, and although neither respected nor loved, his domination and endurance were accepted. A grim landlord, hard creditor, close-fisted patron, and a smileless neighbour who neither gambled nor drank, "Old Hays," as he was called while yet scarce fifty, had few acquaintances and fewer friends. There were those who believed that his domestic infelicities were the result of his unsympathetic nature; it never occurred to any one (but himself probably) that they might have been the cause. In those Sierran altitudes, as elsewhere, the belief in original sin—popularly known as "pure cussedness"—dominated and overbore any consideration of passive, impelling circumstances or temptation, unless they had been actively demonstrated with a revolver. The passive expression of harshness, suspicion, distrust, and moroseness was looked upon as inherent wickedness.

The storm raged violently as Hays emerged from the last of a long range of outbuildings and sheds, and crossed the open space between him and the farmhouse. Before he had reached the porch, with its scant shelter, he had floundered through a snow-drift and faced the full fury of the storm. But the snow seemed to have glanced from his hard angular figure as it had from his roof-ridge, for when he entered the narrow hall-way his pilot jacket was

unmarked, except where a narrow line of powdered flakes outlined the seams as if worn. To the right was an apartment, half office, half sitting-room, furnished with a dark and chilly iron safe, a sofa and chairs covered with black and coldly shining horsehair. Here Hays not only removed his upper coat but his under one also, and drawing a chair before the fire, sat down in his shirt-sleeves. It was his usual rustic pioneer habit, and might have been some lingering reminiscence of certain remote ancestors to whom clothes were an impediment. He was warming his hands and placidly ignoring his gaunt arms in their thinly-clad "hickory" sleeves, when a young girl of eighteen sauntered, half-perfunctorily, half-inquisitively, into the room. It was his only remaining daughter. Already elected by circumstances to a dry household virginity, her somewhat large features, sallow complexion, and tasteless, unattractive dress did not obviously suggest a sacrifice. Since her sister's departure she had taken sole charge of her father's domestic affairs and the few rude servants he employed, with a certain inherited following of his own moods and methods. To the neighbours she was known as "Miss Hays"—a dubious respect that in a community of familiar "Sallys," "Mamies," "Pussies," was grimly prophetic. Yet she rejoiced in the Oriental appellation of "Zuleika." To this it is needless to add that it was impossible to conceive any one who looked more decidedly Western.

"Ye kin put some things in my carpet bag agin the time the sled comes round," said her father meditatively, without looking up.

"Then you're not coming back to-night?" asked the girl curiously. "What's goin' on at the summit, father?"

"I am," he said grimly. "You don't reckon I kalkilate to stop thar! I'm going on as far as Horseley's to close up that contract afore the weather changes."

"I kinder allowed it was funny you'd go to the hotel to-night. There's a dance there; those two Wetherbee girls and Mamie Harris passed up the road an hour ago on a wood sled, nigh blown to pieces and sittin' up in the snow like skeert white rabbits."

Hays' brow darkened heavily.

"Let 'em go," he said, in a hard voice that the fire did not seem to have softened. "Let 'em go for all the good their fool-parents will ever get out of them, or the herd of way-side cattle they've let them loose among."

"I reckon they haven't much to do at home, or are hard put for company, to travel six miles in the snow to show off their prinkin' to a lot of idle louts, shiny with bear's grease and scented up with doctor's stuff," added the girl, shrugging her shoulders, with a touch of her father's mood and manner.

Perhaps it struck Hays at that moment that her attitude was somewhat monstrous and unnatural for one still young and presumably like other girls, for, after glancing at her under his heavy brows, he said in a gentler tone—

"Never *you* mind, Zuly. When your brother Jack comes home he'll know what's what, and have all the proper New York ways and style. It's nigh on three years now that he's had the best training Dr. Dawson's Academy could give—sayin' nothing of the pow'ful Christian example of one of the best preachers in the States. They mayn't have worldly, ungodly fandangoes where he is, and riotous livin', and scarlet abominations, but I've been told that they've 'tea circles,' and 'assemblies,' and 'harmony concerts' of young folks—and dancin'—yes, fine square dancin' under control. No, I ain't stinted him in anythin'. You kin remember that, Zuleika, when you hear any more gossip and backbitin' about your father's meanness. I ain't spared no money for him."

"I reckon not," said the girl a little sharply. "Why, there's that draft fur two hundred and fifty dollars that kem only last week from the Doctor's fur extras."

"Yes," replied Hays, with a slight knitting of the brows; "the Doctor mout hev writ more particklers, but parsons ain't allus business men. I reckon these here extrys were to push Jack along in the term, as the Doctor knew I wanted him back here in the spring, now that his brother has got to be too stiff-necked and self-opinionated to do his father's work." It seemed from this that there had been a quarrel between Hays and his eldest son, who conducted his branch business at Sacramento, and who had in a passion threatened to set up a rival establishment to his father's. And it was also evident from the manner of the girl that she was by no means a strong partisan of her father in the quarrel.

"You'd better find out first how all the schoolin' and trainin' of Jack's is going to jibe with the Ranch, and if he ain't been eddicated out of all knowledge of station business or keer for it. New York ain't Hays' Ranch, and these yer 'assemblies' and 'harmony' doin's and their airs and graces may put him out of conceit with our plain ways. I reckon ye didn't take that to mind when you've been hustlin' round payin' two hundred and fifty dollar drafts for Jack and quo'llin with Bijah! I ain't sayin' nothin', father; only mebbe if Bijah had had drafts and extrys flourished around him a little more, mebbe he'd have been more polite and not so rough spoken. Mebbe," she continued, with a little laugh, "even *I'd* be a little more in the style to suit Master Jack when he comes ef I had three hundred dollars worth of convent schoolin' like Mamie Harris."

"Yes, and you'd have only made yourself fair game for ev'ry schemin', lazy sport or counter-jumper along the road from this to Sacramento!" responded Hays savagely.

Zuleika laughed again constrainedly, but in a way that

might have suggested that this dreadful contingency was still one that it was possible to contemplate without entire consternation. As she moved slowly towards the door she stopped with her hand on the lock and said tentatively, "I reckon you won't be wantin' any supper before you go? You're almost sure to be offered somethin' up at Horseley's, while if I have to cook you up suthin' now and still have the men's regular supper to get at seven, it makes all the expense of an extra meal."

Hays hesitated. He would have preferred his supper now, and had his daughter pressed him would have accepted it. But economy, which was one of Zuleika's inherited instincts, vaguely appearing to him to be a virtue, interchangeable with chastity and abstemiousness, was certainly to be encouraged in a young girl. It hardly seems possible that with an eye single to the integrity of the larder she could ever look kindly on the blandishments of his sex, or indeed be exposed to them. He said simply, "Don't cook for me," and resumed his attitude before the fire as the girl left the room.

As he sat there, grim and immovable as one of the battered fire-dogs before him, the wind in the chimney seemed to carry on a deep-throated, dejected, and confidential conversation with him, but really had very little to reveal. There were no haunting reminiscences of his married life in this room, which he had always occupied in preference to the company or sitting-room beyond. There were no familiar shadows of the past lurking in its corners to pervade his reverie. When he did reflect, which was seldom, there was always in his mind a vague idea of a central injustice to which he had been subjected, that was to be avoided by a circuitous movement, to be hidden by work, but never to be surmounted. And to-night he was going out in the storm, which he could understand and fight, as he had

often done before, and he was going to drive a bargain with a man like himself, and get the better of him if he could, as he had done before, and another day would be gone, and that central injustice which he could not understand would be circumvented, and he would still be holding his own in the world. And the God of Israel whom he believed in, and who was a hard but conscientious Providence, something like himself, would assist him perhaps some day to the understanding of this same vague injustice which He was, for some strange reason, permitting. But never more unrelenting and unsparing of others than when under conviction of sin himself, and never more harsh and unforgiving than when fresh from the contemplation of the Divine mercy, he still sat there grimly holding his hands to a warmth that never seemed to get nearer his heart than that, when his daughter re-entered the room with his carpet bag.

To rise, put on his coat and overcoat, secure a fur cap on his head by a woollen comforter, covering his ears and twined round his throat, and to rigidly offer a square and weather-beaten cheek to his daughter's dusty kiss, did not apparently suggest any lingering or hesitation. The sled was at the door, which for a tumultuous moment opened on the storm and the white vision of a horse knee-deep in a drift, and then closed behind him. Zuleika shot the bolt, brushed some flakes of the invading snow from the mat, and, after frugally raking down the fire on the hearth her father had just quitted, retired through the long passage to the kitchen and her domestic supervision.

It was a few hours later; supper had long past, the "hands" had one by one returned to their quarters under the roof or in the adjacent lofts, and Zuleika and the two maids had at last abandoned the kitchen for their bedroom

beyond. Zuleika herself, by the light of a solitary candle, had entered the office and had dropped meditatively into a chair, as she slowly raked the warm ashes over the still smouldering fire. The barking of dogs had momentarily attracted her attention, but it had suddenly ceased. It was followed, however, by a more startling incident—a slight movement outside, and an attempt to raise the window!

She was not frightened; perhaps there was little for her to fear: it was known that Hays kept no money in the house; the safe was only used for securities and contracts, and there were half a dozen men within call. It was, therefore, only her usual active, burning curiosity for novel incident that made her run to the window and peer out; but it was with a spontaneous cry of astonishment she turned and darted to the front door, and opened it to the muffled figure of a young man.

"Jack! Saints alive! Why, of all things!" she gasped incoherently.

He stopped her with an impatient gesture, and a hand that prevented her from closing the door again.

"Dad ain't here?" he asked quickly.

"No."

"When'll he be back?"

"Not to-night."

"Good," he said, turning to the door again. She could see a motionless horse and sleigh in the road, with a woman holding the reins.

He beckoned to the woman, who drove to the door and jumped out. Tall, handsome, and audacious, she looked at Zuleika with a quick laugh of confidence, as at some recognised absurdity.

"Go in there," said the young man, opening the door of the office; "I'll come back in a minute."

As she entered, still smiling, as if taking part in some humorous but risky situation, he turned quickly to Zuleika and said in a low voice, "Where can we talk?"

The girl held out her hand and glided hurriedly through the passage until she reached a door, which she opened. By the light of a dying fire he could see it was her bedroom. Lighting a candle on the mantel, she looked eagerly in his face as he threw aside his muffler and opened his coat. It disclosed a spare, youthful figure, and a thin, weak face that a budding moustache only seemed to make still more immature. For an instant brother and sister gazed at each other. Astonishment on her part, nervous impatience on his, apparently repressed any demonstration of family affection. Yet when she was about to speak he stopped her roughly.

"There now ; don't talk. I know what you're goin' to say—could say it myself if I wanted to—and it's no use. Well then, here I am. You saw *her*. Well, she's *my wife*—we've been married three months. Yes, my *wife* ; married three months ago. I'm here because I ran away from school—that is, I *haven't been there* for the last three months. I came out with her last steamer ; we went up to the Summit Hotel last night—where they didn't know me—until we could see how the land lay before popping down on dad. I happened to learn that he was out to-night, and I brought her down here to have a talk. We can go back again before he comes, you know, unless——"

"But," interrupted the girl, with sudden practicality, "you say you ain't been at Doctor Dawson's for three months ! Why, only last week he drew on dad for two hundred and fifty dollars for your extras !"

He glanced around him, and then arranged his necktie in the glass above the mantel with a nervous laugh.

"*Oh, that!* I fixed that up, and got the money for it in New York to pay our passage with. It's all right, you know."

CHAPTER II.

THE girl stood looking at the ingenious forger with an odd, breathless smile. It was difficult to determine, however, if gratified curiosity were not its most dominant expression.

"And you've got a wife—and *that's* her?" she resumed.

"Yes."

"Where did you first meet her? Who is she?"

"She's an actress—mighty popular in 'Frisco—I mean New York. Lot o' chaps tried to get her—I cut 'em out. For all dad's trying to keep me at Dawson's—I ain't such a fool, eh?"

Nevertheless, as he stood there stroking his fair moustache, his astuteness did not seem to impress his sister to enthusiastic assent. Yet she did not relax her breathless, inquisitive smile as she went on—

"And what are you going to do about dad?"

He turned upon her querulously.

"Well, that's what I want to talk about."

"You'll catch it!" she said impressively.

But here her brother's nervousness broke out into a weak, impotent fury. It was evident, too, that in spite of its apparent spontaneous irritation its intent was studied. Catch it! Would he? Oh yes! Well, she'd see *who'd* catch it! Not him. No, he'd had enough of this meanness, and wanted it ended! He wasn't a woman, to be treated like his sister—like their mother—like their brother, if it came to that, for he knew how he was to be brought back to take Bijah's place in the spring; he'd heard the whole

story. No, he was going to stand up for his rights—he was going to be treated as the son of a man who was worth half a million ought to be treated! He wasn't going to be skimped, while his father was wallowing in money that he didn't know what to do with—money that by rights ought to have been given to their mother and their sister. Why, even the law wouldn't permit such meanness—if he was dead. No, he'd come back with Lottie, his wife, to show his father that there was one of the family that couldn't be fooled and bullied, and wouldn't put up with it any longer. There was going to be a fair division of the property, and his sister Annie's property, and hers—Zuleika's—too, if she'd have the pluck to speak up for herself. All this and much more he said. Yet even while his small fury was genuine and characteristic, there was such an evident incongruity between himself and his speech that it seemed to fit him loosely, and in a measure flapped in his gestures like another's' garment. Zuleika, who had exhibited neither disgust nor sympathy with his rebellion, but had rather appeared to enjoy it as a novel domestic performance, the morality of which devolved solely upon the performer, retained her curious smile. And then a knock at the door startled them.

It was the stranger—slightly apologetic and still humorous, but firm and self-confident withal. She was sorry to interrupt their family council, but the fire was going out where she sat, and she would like a cup of tea or some refreshment. She did not look at Jack, but, completely ignoring him, addressed herself to Zuleika with what seemed to be a direct challenge; in that feminine eye-grapple there was a quick, instinctive, and final struggle between the two women. The stranger triumphed. Zuleika's vacant smile changed to one of submission, and then equally ignoring her brother in this double defeat, she hastened to

the kitchen to do the visitor's bidding. The woman closed the door behind her, and took Zuleika's place before the fire.

"Well?" she said, in a half-contemptuous toleration.

"Well?" said Jack, in an equally ill-disguised discontent, but an evident desire to placate the woman before him. "It's all right, you know. I've had my say. It'll come right, Lottie, you'll see."

The woman smiled again, and glanced around the bare walls of the room.

"And I suppose," she said dryly, "when it comes right I'm to take the place of your sister in the charge of this workhouse, and succeed to the keys of that safe in the other room?"

"It'll come all right, I tell you; you can fix things up here any way you'll like when we get the old man straight," said Jack, with the iteration of feebleness. "And as to that safe, I've seen it chock full of securities."

"It'll hold one less to-night," she said, looking at the fire.

"What are you talking about?" he asked, in querulous suspicion.

She drew a paper from her pocket.

"It's that draft of yours that you were crazy enough to sign Dawson's name to. It was lying out there on the desk. I reckon it isn't a thing you care to have kept as evidence, even by your father."

She held it in the flames until it was consumed.

"By Jove, your head is level, Lottie!" he said, with an admiration that was not, however, without a weak reserve of suspicion.

"No, it isn't, or I wouldn't be here," she said curtly. Then she added, as if dismissing the subject, "Well, what did you tell her?"

"Oh, I said I met you in New York. You see I thought she might think it queer if she knew I only met you in San Francisco three weeks ago. Of course I said we were married."

She looked at him with weary astonishment.

"And of course, whether things go right or not, she'll find out that I've got a husband living, that I never met you in New York, but on the steamer, and that you've lied. I don't see the *use* of it. You said you were going to tell the whole thing squarely and say the truth, and that's why I came to help you."

"Yes; but don't you see, hang it all!" he stammered, in the irritation of weak confusion, "I had to tell her *something*. Father won't dare to tell her the truth, no more than he will the neighbours. He'll hush it up, you bet; and when we get this thing fixed you'll go and get your divorce, you know, and we'll be married privately on the square."

He looked so vague, so immature, yet so fatuously self-confident, that the woman extended her hand with a laugh and tapped him on the back as she might have patted a dog. Then she disappeared to follow Zuleika in the kitchen.

When the two women returned together they were evidently on the best of terms. So much so that the man, with the easy reaction of a shallow nature, became sanguine and exalted, even to an ostentatious exhibition of those New York graces on which the paternal Hays had set such store. He complacently explained the methods by which he had deceived Doctor Dawson; how he had himself written a letter from his father commanding him to return to take his brother's place, and how he had shown it to the Doctor and been three months in San Francisco looking for work and assisting Lottie at the theatre, until

a conviction of the righteousness of his cause, perhaps combined with the fact that they were also short of money and she had no engagement, impelled him to his present heroic step. All of which Zuleika listened to with childish interest, but superior appreciation of his companion. The fact that this woman was an actress, an abomination vaguely alluded to by her father as being even more mysteriously wicked than her sister and mother, and correspondingly exciting, as offering a possible permanent relief to the monotony of her home life, seemed to excuse her brother's weakness. She was almost ready to become his partisan—*after* she had seen her father.

They had talked largely of their plans; they had settled small details of the future and the arrangement of the property; they had agreed that Zuleika should be relieved of her household drudgery, and sent to a fashionable school in San Francisco with a music teacher and a dressmaker. They had discussed everything but the precise manner in which the revelation should be conveyed to Hays. There was still plenty of time for that, for he would not return until to-morrow at noon, and it was already tacitly understood that the vehicle of transmission should be a letter from the Summit Hotel. The possible contingency of a sudden outburst of human passion not entirely controlled by religious feeling was to be guarded against.

They were sitting comfortably before the replenished fire; the wind was still moaning in the chimney, when suddenly in a lull of the storm the sound of sleigh bells seemed to fill the room. It was followed by a voice from without, and with a hysterical cry Zuleika started to her feet. The same breathless smile with which she had greeted her brother an hour ago was upon her lips as she gasped—

"Lord, save us!—but it's dad come back!"

I grieve to say that here the doughty redresser of domestic wrongs and retriever of the family honour lapsed white-faced in his chair idealess and tremulous. It was his frailer companion who rose to the occasion and even partly dragged him with her. "Go back to the hotel," she said quickly, "and take the sled with you—you are not fit to face him now! But he does not know *me*, and I will stay!" To the staring Zuleika, "I am a stranger stopped by a broken sleigh on my way to the hotel. Leave the rest to me. Now clear out, both of you. I'll let him in."

She looked so confident, self-contained, and superior, that the thought of opposition never entered their minds, and as an impatient rapping rose from the door they let her, with a half-impatient, half-laughing gesture, drive them before her from the room. When they had disappeared in the distance, she turned to the front door, unbolted and opened it. Hays blundered in out of the snow with a muttered exclamation, and then, as the light from the open office door revealed a stranger, started and fell back.

"Miss Hays is busy," said the woman quietly, "I am afraid on my account. But my sleigh broke down on the way to the hotel, and I was forced to get out here. I suppose this is Mr. Hays?"

A strange woman—by her dress and appearance a very worldling—and even braver in looks and apparel than many he had seen in the cities—seemed, in spite of all his precautions, to have fallen short of the hotel and been precipitated upon him! Yet under the influence of some odd abstraction he was affected by it less than he could have believed. He even achieved a rude bow as he bolted the door and ushered her into the office. More than that, he found himself explaining to the fair trespasser the

reasons of his return to his own home. For, like a direct man, he had a consciousness of some inconsistency in his return—or in the circumstances that induced a change of plans which might conscientiously require an explanation.

"You see, ma'am, a rather singular thing happened to me after I passed the summit. Three times I lost the track, got off it somehow, and found myself travelling in a circle. The third time, when I struck my own tracks again, I concluded I'd just follow them back here. I suppose I might have got the road again by tryin' and fightin' the snow—but there's some things not worth the fightin'. This was a matter of business—and, after all, ma'am, business ain't everythin'—is it?"

He was evidently in some unusual mood, the mood that with certain reticent natures often compels them to make their brief confidences to utter strangers rather than impart them to those intimate friends who might remind them of their weakness. She agreed with him pleasantly, but not so obviously as to excite suspicion. "And you preferred to let your business go, and come back to the comfort of your own home and family."

"The comfort of my home and family?" he repeated in a dry, deliberate voice. "Well, I reckon I ain't been tempted much by *that*. That isn't what I meant." But he went back to the phrase, repeating it grimly as if it were some mandatory text. "The comfort of my *own home and family!* Well, Satan hasn't set *that* trap for my feet yet, ma'am. No; ye saw my daughter? well, that's all my family; ye see this room? that's all my home. My wife ran away from me; my daughter cleared out too; my eldest son as was with me here has quo'lled with me, and reckons to set up a rival business agin me. No," he said, still more meditatively and deliberately; "it wasn't to come back to

the comforts of my own home and family that I faced round on Heavy Tree Hill, I reckon."

As the woman, for certain reasons, had no desire to check this auspicious and unlooked-for confidence, she waited patiently. Hays remained silent for an instant warming his hands before the fire, and then looked up interrogatively.

"A professor of religion, ma'am, or under conviction?"

"Not exactly," said the lady, smiling.

"Excuse me, but in spite of your fine clothes I reckoned you had a serious look just now. A reader of Scripture, maybe?"

"I know the Bible."

"You remember when the angel with the flamin' sword appeared unto Saul on the road to Damascus?"

"Yes."

"It mout hev been suthin' in that style that stopped me," he said slowly and tentatively. "Though nat'rally *I* didn't *see* anything, and only had the queer feelin'. It might hev been *that* shied my mare off the track."

"But Saul was up to some wickedness, wasn't he?" said the lady smilingly, "while *you* were simply going somewhere on business?"

"Yes," said Hays thoughtfully; "but my *business* might hev seemed like persecution. I don't mind tellin' you what it was if you'd care to listen. But mebbe you're tired. Mebbe you want to retire. You know," he went on with a sudden hospitable outburst, "you needn't be in any hurry to go; we kin take care of you here to-night, and it'll cost you nothin'. And I'll send you on with my sleigh in the mornin'. Per'aps you'd like suthin' to eat—a cup of tea—or—I'll call Zuleika," and he rose, with an expression of awkward courtesy.

But the lady, albeit with a self-satisfied sparkle in her

dark eyes, here carelessly assured him that Zuleika had already given her refreshment, and indeed was at that moment preparing her own room for her. She begged he would not interrupt this interesting story.

Hays looked relieved.

"Well, I reckon I won't call her, for what I was goin' to say ain't exakly the sort o' thin' for an innocent, simple sort o' thing like her to hear—I mean," he interrupted himself hastily—"that folks of more experience of the world like you and me don't mind speakin' of—I'm sorter takin' it for granted that you're a married woman, ma'am."

The lady, who had regarded him with a sudden rigidity, here relaxed her expression and nodded.

"Well," continued Hays, resuming his place by the fire, "you see this yer man I was goin' to see lives about four miles beyond the summit on a ranch that furnishes most of the hay for the stock that side of the Divide. He's bin holdin' off his next year's contracts with me, hopin' to make better terms from the prospects of a late spring and higher prices. He held his head mighty high, and talked big of waitin' his own time. I happened to know he couldn't do it."

He put his hands on his knees and stared at the fire, and then went on—

"Ye see this man had had crosses and family trials. He had a wife that left him to jine a lot of bally dancers and painted women in the 'Frisco playhouses when he was livin' in the southern country. You'll say that was like *my* own case—and mebbe that was why it came to him to tell me about it—but the difference betwixt *him* and *me* was that instead of restin' unto the Lord and findin' Him, and pluckin' out the eye that offended him 'cordin' to Scriptor, as I did, *he* followed after *her* tryin' to get her back, until, findin' that wasn't no use, he took a big disgust and came

up here to hide hisself, where there wasn't no playhouse nor play-actors, and no wimmen but Injin squaws. He preempted the land, and nat'rally, there bein' no one ez cared to live there but himself, he had it all his own way, made it pay, and, as I was sayin' before, held his head high for prices. Well—you ain't gettin' tired, ma'am?"

"No," said the lady, resting her cheek on her hand and gazing at the fire; "it's all very interesting, and so odd that you two men, with nearly the same experiences, should be neighbours."

"Say buyer and seller, ma'am, not neighbours—at least Scriptoorily—nor friends. Well—now this is where the Speshal Providence comes in—only this afternoon Jim Briggs, hearin' me speak of Horseley's offishness——"

"*Whose* offishness?" asked the lady.

"Horseley's offishness—Horseley's the name of the man I'm talkin' about. Well, hearin' that, he says, 'You hold on, Hays, and he'll climb down. That wife of his has left the stage—got sick of it—and is driftin' round in 'Frisco with some fellow. When Horseley gets to hear that, you can't keep him here—he'll settle up, sell out, and realise on everything he's got to go after her agin—you bet.' That's what Briggs said. Well, that's what sent me up to Horseley's to-night—to get there, drop the news, and then pin him down to that contract."

"It looked like a good stroke of business and a fair one," said the lady in an odd voice. It was so odd that Hays looked up. But she had somewhat altered her position, and was gazing at the ceiling, and with her hand to her face seemed to have just recovered from a slight yawn, at which he hesitated with a new and timid sense of politeness.

"You're gettin' tired, ma'am?"

"Oh dear, no!" she said in the same voice, but clearing her throat with a little cough. "And why didn't you see this Mr. Horseley after all? Oh, I forgot!—you said you changed your mind from something you'd heard."

He had turned his eyes to the fire again, but without noticing as he did so that she slowly moved her face, still half hidden by her hand, towards him, and was watching him intently.

"No," he said; slowly "nothin' I heard, somethin' I felt. It mout hev been that that set off on the track. It kem to me all of a sudden that he might be sittin' thar calm and peaceful like ez I might be here, hevin' forgot all about her and his trouble, and here was me goin' to drop down upon him and start it all fresh agin. It looked a little like persecution—yes, like persecution. I got rid of it, sayin' to myself it was business. But I'd got off the road meantime, and had to find it again, and whenever I got back to the track and was pointed for his house, it all seemed to come back on me and set me off again. When that had happened three times, I turned round and started for home."

"And do you mean to say," said the lady, with a discordant laugh, "that you believe, because *you* didn't go there and break the news, that nobody else will? That he won't hear of it from the first man he meets?"

"He don't meet any one up where he lives, and only Briggs and myself know it, and I'll see that Briggs don't tell. But it was mighty queer this whole thing comin' upon me suddenly—wasn't it?"

"Very queer," replied the lady, "for," with the same metallic laugh, "you don't seem to be given to this kind of weakness with your own family."

If there was any doubt as to the sarcastic suggestion of her voice, there certainly could be none in the wicked glitter

of her eyes fixed upon his face under her shading hand. But haply he seemed unconscious of both, and even accepted her statement without an ulterior significance.

"Yes," he said communingly, to the glaring embers of the hearth, "it must have been a special revelation."

There was something so fatuous and one-ideal in his attitude and expression, so monstrously inconsistent and inadequate to what was going on around him, and so hopelessly stupid—if a mere simulation—that the angry suspicion that he was acting a part slowly faded from her eyes, and a hysterical smile began to twitch her set lips. She still gazed at him. The wind howled drearily in the chimney; all that was economic, grim, and cheerless in the room seemed to gather as flitting shadows around that central figure. Suddenly she arose with such a quick rustling of her skirts that he lifted his eyes with a start; for she was standing immediately before him, her hands behind her, her handsome, audacious face bent smilingly forward, and her bold brilliant eyes within a foot of his own.

"Now, Mr. Hays, do you want to know what this warning or special revelation of yours *really* meant? Well, it had nothing whatever to do with that man on the summit. No. The whole interest, gist, and meaning of it was simply this, that you should turn round and come straight back here and"—she drew back and made him an exaggerated theatrical curtsey—"have the supreme pleasure of making *my* acquaintance! That was all. And now, as you've *had it*, in five minutes I must be off. You've offered me already your horse and sleigh to go to the summit. I accept it and go! Good-bye!"

He knew nothing of a woman's coquettish humour; he knew still less of that mimic stage from which her present voice, gesture, and expression were borrowed; he had no

knowledge of the burlesque emotions which that voice, gesture, and expression were supposed to portray, and finally and fatally he was unable to detect the feminine hysteric jar and discord that underlay it all. He thought it was strong, characteristic, and real, and accepted it literally. He rose.

"Ef you allow you can't stay, why, I'll go and get the horse. I reckon he ain't bin put up yet."

"Do, please."

He grimly resumed his coat and hat and disappeared through the passage into the kitchen, whence, a moment later, Zuleika came flying.

"Well, what has happened?" she said eagerly.

"It's all right," said the woman quickly, "though he knows nothing yet. But I've got things fixed generally, so that he'll be quite ready to have it broken to him by this time to-morrow. But don't you say anything till I've seen Jack and you hear from *him*. Remember."

She spoke rapidly; her cheeks were quite glowing from some sudden energy; so were Zuleika's with the excitement of curiosity. Presently the sound of sleigh bells again filled the room. It was Hays leading the horse and sleigh to the door, beneath a sky now starlit and crisp under a north-east wind. The fair stranger cast a significant glance at Zuleika, and whispered hurriedly, "You know he must not come with me. You must keep him here."

She ran to the door muffled and hooded, leaped into the sleigh, and gathered up the reins.

"But you cannot go alone," said Hays, with awkward courtesy. "I was kalkilatin'——"

"You're too tired to go out again, dad," broke in Zuleika's voice quickly. "You ain't fit; you're all grey and krinkly now, like as when you had one of your last spells. She'll send the sleigh back to-morrow."

"I can find my way," said the lady briskly; "there's only one turn off, I believe, and that——"

"Leads to the stage station three miles west. You needn't be afraid of gettin' off on that, for you'll likely see the down stage crossin' your road as soon ez you get clear of the Ranch."

"Good-night," said the lady. An arc of white spray sprang before the forward runner, and the sleigh vanished in the road.

Father and daughter returned to the office.

"You didn't get to know her, dad, did ye?" queried Zuleika.

"No," responded Hays gravely; "except to see she wasn't no backwoods or mountaineering sort. Now, there's the kind of woman, Zuly, as knows her own mind and yours too; that a man like your brother Jack oughter pick out when he marries."

Zuleika's face beamed behind her father. "You ain't goin' to sit up any longer, dad?" she said, as she noticed him resume his seat by the fire. "It's gettin' late, and you look mighty tuckered out with your night's work."

"Do you know what she said, Zuly?" returned her father, after a pause, which turned out to have been a long silent laugh.

"No."

"She said," he repeated slowly, "that she reckoned I came back here to-night to have the pleasure of her acquaintance!" He brought his two hands heavily down upon his knees, rubbing them down deliberately towards his ankles, and leaning forward with his face to the fire and a long-sustained smile of complete though tardy appreciation.

He was still in this attitude when Zuleika left him. The wind crooned over him confidentially, but he still sat there,

given up apparently to some posthumous enjoyment of his visitor's departing witticism.

It was scarcely daylight when Zuleika, while dressing, heard a quick tapping upon her shutter. She opened it to the scared and bewildered face of her brother.

"What happened with her and father last night?" he said hoarsely.

"Nothing—why?"

"Read that. It was brought to me half an hour ago by a man in dad's sleigh, from the stage station."

He handed her a crumpled note with trembling fingers. She took it and read—

"The game's up, and I'm out of it! Take my advice and clear out of it too, until you can come back in better shape. Don't be such a fool as to try and follow me. Your father isn't one, and that's where you've slipped up."

"He shall pay for it, whatever he's done," said her brother, with an access of wild passion. "Where is he?"

"Why, Jack, you wouldn't dare to see him now?"

"Wouldn't I?" He turned and ran, convulsed with passion, before the windows towards the front of the house. Zuleika slipped out of her bedroom and ran to her father's room. He was not there. Already she could hear her brother hammering frantically against the locked front door.

The door of the office was partly open. Her father was still there. Asleep? Yes, for he had apparently sank forward before the cold hearth. But the hands that he had always been trying to warm were colder than the hearth or ashes, and he himself never again spoke nor stirred.

It was deemed providential by the neighbours that his youngest and favourite son, alarmed by news of his father's failing health, had arrived from the Atlantic States just at

the last moment. But it was thought singular that after the division of the property he entirely abandoned the Ranch, and that even pending the division his beautiful but fastidious Eastern bride declined to visit it with her husband.

Johnson's "Old Woman."

It was growing dark, and the Sonora trail was becoming more indistinct before me at every step. The difficulty had increased over the grassy slope, where the overflow from some smaller watercourse above had worn a number of diverging gullies so like the trail as to be undistinguishable from it. Unable to determine which was the right one, I threw the reins over the mule's neck and resolved to trust to that superior animal's sagacity, of which I had heard so much. But I had not taken into account the equally well-known weaknesses of sex and species, and Chu Chu had already shown uncontrollable signs of wanting her own way. Without a moment's hesitation, feeling the relaxed bridle, she laid down and rolled over.

In this perplexity the sound of horse's hoofs ringing out of the rocky cañon beyond was a relief, even if momentarily embarrassing. An instant afterwards a horse and rider appeared cantering round the hill on what was evidently the lost trail, and pulled up as I succeeded in forcing Chu Chu to her legs again.

"Is that the trail from Sonora?" I asked.

"Yes;" but with a critical glance at the mule, "I reckon you ain't going thar to-night."

"Why not?"

"It's a matter of eighteen miles, and most of it a blind trail through the woods after you take the valley."

"Is it worse than this?"

"What's the matter with this trail? Ye ain't expecting a racecourse or a shell road over the foot hills—are ye?"

"No. Is there any hotel where I can stop?"

"Nary."

"Nor any house?"

"No."

"Thank you. Good-night."

He had already passed on, when he halted again and turned in his saddle. "Look yer. Just a spell over yon cañon ye'll find a patch o' buckeyes; turn to the right and ye'll see a trail. That'll take ye to a shanty. You ask if it's Johnson's."

"Who's Johnson?"

"I am. You ain't lookin' for Vanderbilt or God Almighty up here, are you? Well then, you hark to me, will you? You say to my old woman to give you supper and a shake-down somewhar to-night. Say *I* sent you. So long."

He was gone before I could accept or decline. An extraordinary noise proceeded from Chu Chu, not unlike a suppressed chuckle. I looked sharply at her; she coughed affectedly, and, with her head and neck stretched to their greatest length, appeared to contemplate her neat little off fore shoe with admiring abstraction. But as soon as I had mounted she set off abruptly, crossed the rocky cañon, apparently sighted the patch of buckeyes of her own volition, and without the slightest hesitation found the trail to the right, and in half an hour stood before the shanty.

It was a log cabin, with an additional "lean-to" of the same material, roofed with bark, and on the other side a larger and more ambitious "extension" built of rough,

unplaned, and unpainted redwood boards, lightly shingled. The "lean-to" was evidently used as a kitchen, and the central cabin as a living-room. The barking of a dog as I approached called four children of different sizes to the open door, where already an enterprising baby was feebly essaying to crawl over a bar of wood laid across the threshold to restrain it.

"Is this Johnson's house?"

My remark was really addressed to the eldest, a boy of apparently nine or ten, but I felt that my attention was unduly fascinated by the baby, who at that moment had toppled over the bar, and was calmly eyeing me upside down, while silently and heroically suffocating in its petticoats. The boy disappeared without replying, but presently returned with a taller girl of fourteen or fifteen. I was struck with the way that, as she reached the door, she passed her hands rapidly over the heads of the others as if counting them, picked up the baby, reversed it, shook out its clothes, and returned it to the inside without even looking at it. The act was evidently automatic and habitual.

I repeated my question timidly.

Yes, it *was* Johnson's, but he had just gone to King's Mills. I replied hurriedly that I knew it—that I had met him beyond the cañon. As I had lost my way and couldn't get to Sonora to-night, he had been good enough to say that I might stay until morning. My voice was slightly raised for the benefit of Mr. Johnson's "old woman," who, I had no doubt, was inspecting me furtively from some corner.

The girl drew the children away, except the boy. To him she said simply, "Show the stranger whar to stake out his mule, 'Dolphus,'" and disappeared in the "extension" without another word. I followed my little guide, who was

perhaps more actively curious, but equally unresponsive. To my various questions he simply returned a smile of exasperating vacuity. But he never took his eager eyes from me, and I was satisfied that not a detail of my appearance escaped him. Leading the way behind the house to a little wood, whose only "clearing" had been effected by decay or storm, he stood silently apart while I picketed Chu Chu, neither offering to assist me nor opposing any interruption to my survey of the locality. There was no trace of human cultivation in the surroundings of the cabin; the wilderness still trod sharply on the heels of the pioneer's fresh footprints, and even seemed to obliterate them. For a few yards around the actual dwelling there was an unsavoury fringe of civilisation in the shape of cast off clothes, empty bottles, and tin cans, and the adjacent thorn and elder bushes blossomed unwholesomely with bits of torn white paper and bleaching dish-cloths. This hideous circle never widened; Nature always appeared to roll back the intruding *débris*; no bird nor beast carried it away; no animal ever forced the uncleanly barrier; civilisation remained grimly trenched in its own exuvia. The old terrifying girdle of fire around the hunters' camp was not more deterring to curious night prowlers than this coarse and accidental outwork.

When I regained the cabin I found it empty, the doors of the lean-to and extension closed, but there was a stool set before a rude table, upon which smoked a tin cup of coffee, a tin dish of hot saleratus biscuit, and a plate of fried beef. There was something odd and depressing in this silent exclusion of my presence. Had Johnson's "old woman" from some dark post of observation taken a dislike to my appearance, or was this churlish withdrawal a peculiarity of Sierran hospitality? Or was Mrs. Johnson young and pretty, and hidden under the restricting ban of

Johnson's jealousy, or was she a deformed cripple, or even a bed-ridden crone? From the extension at times came a murmur of voices, but never the accents of adult womanhood. The gathering darkness, relieved only by a dull glow from the smouldering logs in the adobe chimney, added to my loneliness. In the circumstances I knew I ought to have put aside the repast and given myself up to gloomy and pessimistic reflection; but Nature is often inconsistent, and in that keen mountain air, I grieve to say, my physical and moral condition was not in that perfect accord always indicated by romancers. I had an appetite, and I gratified it; dyspepsia and ethical reflections might come later. I ate the saleratus biscuit cheerfully, and was meditatively finishing my coffee when a gurgling sound from the rafters above attracted my attention. I looked up; under the overhang of the bark roof three pairs of round eyes were fixed upon me. They belonged to the children I had previously seen, who, in the attitude of Raphael's cherubs, had evidently been deeply interested spectators of my repast. As our eyes met an inarticulate giggle escaped the lips of the youngest.

I never could understand why the shy amusement of children over their elders is not accepted as philosophically by its object as when it proceeds from an equal. We fondly believe that when Jones or Brown laughs at us it is from malice, ignorance, or a desire to show his superiority, but there is always a haunting suspicion in our minds that these little critics *really* see something in us to laugh at. I, however, smiled affably in return, ignoring any possible grotesqueness in my manner of eating in private.

"Come here, Johnny," I said blandly.

The two elder ones, a girl and a boy, disappeared instantly, as if the crowning joke of this remark was too much

for them. From a scraping and kicking against the log wall I judged that they had quickly dropped to the ground outside. The younger one, the giggler, remained fascinated, but ready to fly at a moment's warning.

"Come here, Johnny, boy," I repeated gently. "I want you to go to your mother, please, and tell her——"

But here the child, who had been working its face convulsively, suddenly uttered a lugubrious howl and disappeared also. I ran to the front door and looked out in time to see the tallest girl, who had received me, walking away with it under her arm, pushing the boy ahead of her and looking back over her shoulder, not unlike a youthful she-bear conducting her cubs from danger. She disappeared at the end of the extension, where there was evidently another door.

It was very extraordinary. It was not strange that I turned back to the cabin with a chagrin and mortification which for a moment made me entertain the wild idea of saddling Chu Chu and shaking the dust of that taciturn house from my feet. But the ridiculousness of such an act, to say nothing of its ingratitude, as quickly presented itself to me. Johnson had offered me only food and shelter; I could have claimed no more from the inn I had asked him to direct me to. I did not re-enter the house, but, lighting my last cigar, began to walk gloomily up and down the trail. With the outcoming of the stars it had grown lighter; through a wind opening in the trees I could see the heavy bulk of the opposite mountain, and beyond it a superior crest defined by a red line of forest fire, which, however, cast no reflection on the surrounding earth or sky. Faint woodland currents of air, still warm from the afternoon sun, stirred the leaves around me with long-drawn aromatic breaths. But these in time gave way to the steady Sierran night wind sweeping down from the higher summits, and

rocking the tops of the tallest pines, yet leaving the tranquillity of the dark lower aisles unshaken. It was very quiet; there was no cry nor call of beast or bird in the darkness; the long rustle of the tree-tops sounded as faint as the far-off wash of distant seas. Nor did the resemblance cease there; the close-set files of the pines and cedars, stretching in illimitable ranks to the horizon, were filled with the immeasurable loneliness of an ocean shore. In this vast silence I began to think I understood the taciturnity of the dwellers in the solitary cabin.

When I returned, however, I was surprised to find the tallest girl standing by the door. As I approached she retreated before me, and, pointing to the corner where a common cot bed had been evidently just put up, said, "Ye can turn in thar, only ye'll have to rouse out early when 'Dolphus does the chores," and was turning towards the extension again, when I stopped her almost appealingly.

"One moment, please. Can I see your mother?"

She stopped and looked at me with a singular expression. Then she said sharply—

"You know, fust rate, she's dead."

She was turning away again, but I think she must have seen my concern in my face, for she hesitated. "But," I said quickly, "I certainly understood your father, that is, Mr. Johnson," I added interrogatively, "to say that—that I was to speak to"—I didn't like to repeat the exact phrase—"his *wife*."

"I don't know what he was playin' ye for," she said shortly. "Mar has been dead mor'n a year."

"But," I persisted, "is there no grown-up woman here?"

"No."

"Then who takes care of you and the children?"

"I do."

"Yourself and your father—eh?"

"Dad ain't here two days running, and then on'y to sleep."

"And you take the entire charge of the house?"

"Yes, and the log tallies."

"The log tallies?"

"Yes; keep count and measure the logs that go by the slide."

It flashed upon me that I had passed the slide or declivity on the hill side, where logs were slipped down into the valley, and I inferred that Johnson's business was cutting timber for the mill.

"But you're rather young for all this work," I suggested.

"I'm goin' on sixteen," she said gravely.

Indeed, for the matter of that, she might have been any age. Her face, on which sunburn took the place of complexion, was already hard and set. But on a nearer view I was struck with the fact that her eyes, which were not large, were almost indistinguishable from the presence of the most singular eyelashes I had ever seen. Intensely black, intensely thick, and even tangled in their profusion, they bristled rather than fringed her eyelids, obliterating everything but the shining black pupils beneath, which were like certain lustrous hairy mountain berries. It was this woodland suggestion that seemed to uncannily connect her with the locality. I went on playfully—

"That's not *very* old; but tell me—does your father, or *did* your father, ever speak of you as 'his old woman?'"

She nodded. "Then you thought I was mar?" she said, smiling.

It was such a relief to see her worn face relax its expression of pathetic gravity—although this operation quite

buried her eyes in their black thickset hedge again—that I continued cheerfully, "It wasn't much of a mistake, considering all you do for the house and family."

"Then you didn't tell Billy 'to go and be dead in the ground with mar,' as he 'lows you did?" she said half suspiciously, yet trembling on the edge of a smile.

No, I had not; but I admitted that my asking him to go to his mother might have been open to this dismal construction by a sensitive infant mind. She seemed mollified, and again turned to go.

"Good-night, miss—; you know your father didn't tell me your real name," I said.

"Karline!"

"Good-night, Miss Karline."

I held out my hand.

She looked at it and then at me through her intricate eyelashes. Then she struck it aside briskly, but not unkindly, said "Quit foolin', now," as she might have said to one of the children, and disappeared through the inner door. Not knowing whether to be amused or indignant, I remained silent a moment. Then I took a turn outside in the increasing darkness, listened to the now hurrying wind over the tree-tops, re-entered the cabin, closed the door, and went to bed.

But not to sleep. Perhaps the responsibility towards these solitary children, which Johnson had so lightly shaken off, devolved upon me as I lay there, for I found myself imagining a dozen emergencies of their unprotected state which the elder girl could scarcely grapple. There was little to fear from depredatory man or beast—desperadoes of the mountain trail never stooped to ignoble burglary, bear or panther seldom approached a cabin—but there was the chance of sudden illness, fire, the accidents that beset childhood, to say nothing of the narrowing moral and

mental effect of their isolation at that tender age. It was scandalous in Johnson to leave them alone.

In the silence I found I could hear quite distinctly the sound of their voices in the extension, and it was evident that Caroline was putting them to bed. Suddenly a voice was uplifted—her own! She began to sing and the others to join her. It was the repetition of a single verse of a well-known lugubrious negro melody. "All the world am sad and dreary," wailed Caroline, in a high head-note, "everywhere I roam." "O, darkieth," lisped the younger girl in response, "how my heart growth weary, far from the old folkth at h-o-o-me." This was repeated two or three times before the others seemed to get the full swing of it, and then the lines rose and fell sadly and monotonously in the darkness. I don't know why, but I at once got the impression that those motherless little creatures were under a vague belief that their performance was devotional, and was really filling the place of an evening hymn. A brief and indistinct kind of recitation, followed by a dead silence, broken only by the slow creaking of new timber, as if the house were stretching itself to sleep too, confirmed my impression. Then all became quiet again.

But I was more wide awake than before. Finally I rose, dressed myself, and dragging my stool to the fire, took a book from my knapsack, and by the light of a guttering candle, which I discovered in a bottle in the corner of the hearth, began to read. Presently I fell into a doze. How long I slept I could not tell, for it seemed to me that a dreamy consciousness of a dog barking at last forced itself upon me so strongly that I awoke. The barking appeared to come from behind the cabin, in the direction of the clearing where I had tethered Chu Chu. I opened the door hurriedly, ran round the cabin towards the hollow, and was almost at once met by the bulk of the frightened Chu Chu, plunging

out of the darkness towards me, kept only in check by her riata in the hand of a blanketed shape slowly advancing with a gun over its shoulder out of the hollow. Before I had time to recover from my astonishment I was thrown into greater confusion by recognising the shape as none other than Caroline!

Without the least embarrassment or even self-consciousness of her appearance, she tossed the end of the riata to me with the curtest explanation as she passed by. Some prowling bear or catamount had frightened the mule. I had better tether it before the cabin away from the wind.

"But I thought wild beasts never came so near," I said quickly.

"Mule meat's mighty temptin'," said the girl sententiously and passed on. I wanted to thank her; I wanted to say how sorry I was that she had been disturbed; I wanted to compliment her on her quiet midnight courage, and yet warn her against recklessness; I wanted to know whether she had been accustomed to such alarms; and if the gun she carried was really a necessity. But I could only respect her reticence, and I was turning away when I was struck by a more inexplicable spectacle. As she neared the end of the extension I distinctly saw the tall figure of a man, moving with a certain diffidence and hesitation that did not, however, suggest any intention of concealment, among the trees; the girl apparently saw him at the same moment, and slightly slackened her pace. Not more than a dozen feet separated them. He said something that was inaudible to my ears—but whether from his hesitation or the distance, I could not determine. There was no such uncertainty in her reply, however, which was given in her usual curt fashion—"All right. You kin trapse along home now and turn in."

She turned the corner of the extension and disappeared.

The tall figure of the man wavered hesitatingly for a moment, and then vanished also. But I was too much excited by curiosity to accept this unsatisfactory conclusion, and, hastily picketing Chu Chu a few rods from the front door, I ran after him, with an instinctive feeling that he had not gone far. I was right. A few paces distant he had halted in the same dubious, lingering way. "Hallo!" I said.

He turned towards me in the like awkward fashion, but with neither astonishment nor concern.

"Come up and take a drink with me before you go," I said, "if you're not in a hurry. I'm alone here, and since I *have* turned out I don't see why we mightn't have a smoke and a talk together."

"I dursn't."

I looked up at the six feet of strength before me and repeated wonderingly, "Dare not?"

"*She* wouldn't like it." He made a movement with his right shoulder towards the extension.

"Who?"

"Miss Karline."

"Nonsense!" I said. "She isn't in the cabin—you won't see *her*. Come along." He hesitated, although from what I could discern of his bearded face it was weakly smiling.

"Come."

He obeyed, following me not unlike Chu Chu, I fancied, with the same sense of superior size and strength and a slight whitening of the eye, as if ready to shy at any moment. At the door he "backed." Then he entered sideways. I noticed that he cleared the doorway at the top and the sides only by a hair's-breadth.

By the light of the fire I could see that, in spite of his full first growth of beard, he was young—even younger than myself, and that he was by no means bad-looking. As he still showed signs of retreating at any moment, I took my

flask and tobacco from my saddle-bags, handed them to him, pointed to the stool, and sat down myself upon the bed.

"You live near here?"

"Yes," he said a little abstractedly, as if listening for some interruption, "at Ten Mile Crossing."

"Why, that's two miles away."

"I reckon."

"Then you don't live here—on the clearing?"

"No. I b'long to the mill at 'Ten Mile.'"

"You were on your way home?"

"No," he hesitated, looking at his pipe; "I kinder meander round here at this time, when Johnson's away, to see if everything's goin' straight."

"I see—you're a friend of the family."

"'Deed no!" He stopped, laughed, looked confused, and added, apparently to his pipe, "That is, a sorter friend. Not much. *She*"—he lowered his voice, as if that potential personality filled the whole cabin—"wouldn't like it."

"Then at night, when Johnson's away, you do sentry duty round the house?"

"Yes, 'sentry dooty,' that's it"—he seemed impressed with the suggestion—"that's it! Sentry dooty. You've struck it, pardner."

"And how often is Johnson away?"

"'Bout two or three times a week on an average."

"But Miss Caroline appears to be able to take care of herself. She has no fear."

"Fear! Fear wasn't hangin' round when *she* was born!" He paused. "No, sir. Did ye ever look into them eyes?"

I hadn't, on account of the lashes. But I didn't care to say this, and only nodded.

"There ain't the created thing livin' or dead that she can't stand straight up to and look at."

I wondered if he had fancied she experienced any diffi-

culty in standing up before that innocently good-humoured face, but I could not resist saying—

"Then I don't see the use of your walking four miles to look after her."

I was sorry for it the next minute, for he seemed to have awkwardly broken his pipe, and had to bend down for a long time afterwards to laboriously pick up the smallest fragments of it. At last he said cautiously—

"Ye noticed them bits o' flannin' round the chillern's throats?"

I remembered that I had, but was uncertain whether it was intended as a preventive of cold or a child's idea of decoration. I nodded.

"That's their trouble. One night, when old Johnson had been off for three days to Coulterville, I was prowling round here and I didn't git to see no one, though there was a light burnin' in the shanty all night. The next night I was here again—the same light twinklin', but no one about. I reckoned that was mighty queer, and I jess crep' up to the house an' listened. I heard suthin' like a little cough onest in a while, and times suthin' like a little moan. I didn't durst to sing out, for I knew *she* wouldn't like it, but I whistled keerless like, to let the chillern know I was there. But it didn't seem to take. I was jess goin' off, when—darn my skin!—if I didn't come across the bucket of water I'd fetched up from the spring *that mornin'*, standin' there full, and *never taken in!* When I saw that I reckoned I'd jess wade in, anyhow, and I knocked. Pooty soon the door was half opened, and I saw her eyes blazin' at me like them coals. Then *she* 'lowed I'd better 'git up and get,' and shet the door too! Then I 'lowed she might tell me what was up—through the door. Then she said—through the door—as how the chillern lay all sick with that hoss-distemper, diphthery. Then she 'lowed she'd use a doctor

ef I'd fetch him. 'Then she 'lowed again I'd better take the baby, that hadn't ketched it yet, along with me, and leave it where it was safe. Then she passed out the baby through the door all wrapped up in a blankit like a papoose, and you bet I made tracks with it. I knowed thar wasn't no good going to the mill, so I let out for White's, four miles beyond, whar there was White's old mother. I told her how things were pointin', and she lent me a hoss, and I jess rounded on Doctor Green at Mountain Jim's, and had him back here afore sun up! And then I heard she wilted—regularly played out, you see—for she had it all along wuss than the lot, and never let on or whimpered!"

"It was well you persisted in seeing her that night," I said, watching the rapt expression of his face. He looked up quickly, became conscious of my scrutiny, and dropped his eyes again, smiled feebly, and drawing a circle in the ashes with the broken pipe-stem, said—

"But *she* didn't like it, though."

I suggested, a little warmly, that if she allowed her father to leave her alone at night with delicate children, she had no right to choose *who* should assist her in an emergency. It struck me afterwards that this was not very complimentary to him, and I added hastily that I wondered if she expected some young lady to be passing along the trail at midnight! But this reminded me of Johnson's style of argument, and I stopped.

"Yes," he said meekly; "and ef she didn't keer enough for herself and her brothers and sisters, she orter remember them Beazeley chillern."

"Beazeley children?" I repeated wonderingly.

"Yes; them two little ones, the size of Mirandy; they're Beazeley's."

"Who is Beazeley, and what are his children doing here?"

"Beazeley up and died at the mill, and she bedevilled her father to let her take his two young 'uns here."

"You don't mean to say that with her other work she's taking care of other people's children too?"

"Yes, and eddicatin' them."

"Educating them?"

"Yes; teachin' them to read and write and do sums. One of our loggers ketched her at it when she was keepin' tally."

We were both silent for some moments.

"I suppose you know Johnson?" I said finally.

"Not much."

"But you call here at other times than when you're helping her?"

"Never been in the house before."

He looked slowly around him as he spoke, raising his eyes to the bare rafters above, and drawing a few long breaths, as if he were inhaling the aura of some unseen presence. He appeared so perfectly gratified and contented, and I was so impressed with this humble and silent absorption of the sacred interior, that I felt vaguely conscious that any interruption of it was a profanation, and I sat still, gazing at the dying fire. Presently he arose, stretched out his hand, shook mine warmly, said, "I reckon I'll meander along," took another long breath, this time secretly, as if conscious of my eyes, and then slouched sideways out of the house into the darkness again, where he seemed suddenly to attain his full height, and so looming, disappeared. I shut the door, went to bed, and slept soundly.

So soundly that when I awoke the sun was streaming on my bed from the open door. On the table before me my breakfast was already laid. When I had dressed and eaten it, struck by the silence, I went to the door and looked out. 'Dolphus was holding Chu Chu by the riata a few paces from the cabin.

"Where's Caroline?" I asked.

He pointed to the woods and said, "Over yon; keeping tally."

"Did she leave any message?"

"Said I was to git your mule for you."

"Anything else?"

"Yes; said you was to go."

I went, but not until I had scrawled a few words of thanks on a leaf of my note-book, which I wrapped about my last Spanish dollar, addressed it to "Miss Johnson," and laid it upon the table.

It was more than a year later that in the bar-room of the Mariposas Hotel a hand was laid upon my sleeve. I looked up. It was Johnson.

He drew from his pocket a Spanish dollar. "I reckoned," he said cheerfully, "I'd run again ye somewhar some time. My old woman told me to give ye that when I did, and say that she 'didn't keep no hotel.' But she allowed she'd keep the letter, and has spelled it out to the chillern."

Here was the opportunity I had longed for to touch Johnson's pride and affection in the brave but unprotected girl. "I want to talk to you about Miss Johnson," I said eagerly.

"I reckon so," he said, with an exasperating smile. "Most fellers do. But she ain't *Miss* Johnson no more. She's married."

"Not to that big chap over from Ten Mile Mills?" I said breathlessly.

"What's the matter with *him*," said Johnson. "Ye didn't expect her to marry a nobleman, did ye?"

I said I didn't see why she shouldn't—and believed that she *had*.

The New Assistant at Pine Clearing School.

CHAPTER I.

THE schoolmistress of Pine Clearing was taking a last look around her schoolroom before leaving it for the day. She might have done so with pride, for the schoolroom was considered a marvel of architectural elegance by the citizens, and even to the ordinary observer was a pretty, villa-like structure, with an open cupola and overhanging roof of diamond-shaped shingles and a deep Elizabethan porch. But it was the monument of a fierce struggle between a newer civilisation and a barbarism of the old days, which had resulted in the clearing away of the pines—and a few other things as incongruous to the new life and far less innocent, though no less sincere. It had cost the community fifteen thousand dollars, and the lives of two of its citizens.

Happily there was no stain of this on the clean white walls, the beautifully-written gilt texts, or the shining black-board, that had offered no record which could not be daily wiped away. And certainly the last person in the world to suggest any reminiscences of its belligerent foundation was the person of the schoolmistress. Mature, thin, precise—not pretty enough to have excited Homeric feuds, nor yet so plain as to preclude certain soothing graces—she

was the widow of a poor Congregational minister, and had been expressly imported from San Francisco to squarely mark the issue between the regenerate and unregenerate life. Low-voiced, gentlewomanly, with the pallor of ill-health perhaps unduly accented by her mourning, which was still cut modishly enough to show off her spare but good figure, she was supposed to represent the model of pious, scholastic refinement. The Opposition—sullen in ditches and at the doors of saloons, or in the fields truculent as their own cattle—nevertheless had lowered their crests and buttoned their coats over their revolutionary red shirts when *she* went by.

As she was stepping from the threshold, she was suddenly confronted by a brisk business-looking man, who was about to enter. "Just in time to catch you, Mrs. Martin," he said hurriedly; then, quickly correcting his manifest familiarity, he added, "I mean, I took the liberty of running in here on my way to the stage office. That matter you spoke of is all arranged. I talked it over with the other trustees, wrote to Sam Barstow, and he's agreeable, and has sent somebody up, and," he rapidly consulted his watch, "he ought to be here now; and I'm on my way to meet him with the other trustees."

Mrs. Martin, who at once recognised her visitor as the Chairman of the School Board, received the abrupt information with the slight tremulousness, faint increase of colour, and hurried breathing of a nervous woman.

"But," she said, "it was only a *suggestion* of mine, Mr. Sperry; I really have no right to ask—I had no idea——"

"It's all right, ma'am—never you mind. We put the case square to Barstow. We allowed that the school was getting too large for you to tackle—I mean, you know, to superintend single-handed; and that these Pike County boys they're running in on us are a little too big and sassy

for a lady like you to lasso and throw down—I mean, to sorter control—don’t you see? But, bless you, Sam Barstow saw it all in a minit! He just jumped at it. I’ve got his letter here—hold on”—he hastily produced a letter from his pocket, glanced over it, suddenly closed it again with embarrassed quickness, yet not so quickly but that the woman’s quicker eyes were caught, and nervously fascinated by the expression “I’m d——d” in a large business hand—and said in awkward haste, “No matter about reading it now—keep you too long—but he’s agreed all right, you know. Must go now—they’ll be waiting. Only I thought I’d drop in a-passin’, to keep you posted;”—and, taking off his hat, he began to back from the porch.

“Is—is—this gentleman who is to assist me—a—a mature professional man—or a—graduate?” hesitated Mrs. Martin, with a faint smile.

“Don’t really know; I reckon Sam—Mr. Barstow—fixed that all right. Must really go now;” and, still holding his hat in his hand as a polite compromise for his undignified haste, he fairly ran off.

Arrived at the stage office, he found the two other trustees awaiting him, and the still more tardy stage-coach. One, a large, smooth-faced, portly man, was the Presbyterian minister; the other, of thinner and more serious aspect, was a large mill-owner.

“I presume,” said the Rev. Mr. Peaseley slowly, “that as our good brother Barstow, in the urgency of the occasion, has, to some extent, anticipated *our* functions in engaging this assistant, he is—a—a—satisfied with his capacity?”

“Sam knows what he’s about,” said the mill-owner cheerfully, “and as he’s regularly buckled down to the work here, and will go his bottom dollar on it, you can safely leave things to him.”

"He certainly has exhibited great zeal," said the reverend gentleman patronisingly.

"Zeal," echoed Sperry enthusiastically; "zeal? Why, he runs Pine Clearing as he runs his bank and his Express Company in Sacramento, and he's as well posted as if he were here all the time. Why, look here;" he nudged the mill-owner secretly, and, as the minister's back was momentarily turned, pulled out the letter he had avoided reading to Mrs. Martin, and pointed to a paragraph. "I'll be d——d," said the writer, "but I'll have peace and quietness at Pine Clearing, if I have to wipe out or make over the whole Pike County gang. Draw on me for a piano if you think Mrs. Martin can work it. But don't say anything to Peaseley first, or he'll want it changed for a harmonium, and that lets us in for psalm-singing till you can't rest. Mind! I don't object to Church influence—it's a good hold!—but you must run *it* with other things equal, and not let it run *you*. I've got the school-house insured for thirty thousand dollars—special rates too."

The mill-owner smiled. "Sam's head is level! But," he added, "he don't say much about the new assistant he's sending."

"Only here he says, 'I reckon the man I send will do all round; for Pike County has its claims as well as Boston.'"

"What does that mean?" asked the mill-owner.

"I reckon he means he don't want Pine Clearing to get too high-toned, any more than he wants it too low down. He's mighty square in his averages—is Sam."

Here speculation was stopped by the rapid oncoming of the stage-coach in all the impotent fury of a belated arrival.

"Had to go round by Montezuma to let off Jack Hill," curtly explained the driver, as he swung himself from the

box, and entered the hotel bar-room in company with the new express-man, who had evidently taken Hill's place on the box-seat. Autocratically indifferent to further inquiry, he called out cheerfully, "Come along, boys, and hear this yer last new yarn about Sam Barstow—it's the biggest thing out." And in another moment the waiting crowd, with glasses in their hands, were eagerly listening to the repetition of the "yarn" from the new express-man, to the apparent exclusion of other matters, mundane and practical.

Thus debarred from information, the three trustees could only watch the passengers as they descended, and try to identify their expected stranger. But in vain: the bulk of the passengers they already knew, the others were ordinary miners and labourers; there was no indication of the new assistant among them. Pending further inquiry they were obliged to wait the conclusion of the express-man's humorous recital. This was evidently a performance of some artistic merit, depending upon a capital imitation of an Irishman, a German Jew, and another voice, which was universally recognised and applauded as being "Sam's style all over!" But for the presence of the minister, Sperry and the mill-owner would have joined the enthusiastic auditors, and inwardly regretted the respectable obligations of their official position.

When the story-teller had concluded amidst a general call for more drinks, Sperry approached the driver. The latter recognising him, turned to his companion carelessly, said, "Here's one of 'em," and was going away, when Sperry stopped him.

"We were expecting a young man."

"Yes," said the driver impatiently, "and there he is, I reckon."

"We don't mean the new express-man," said the minister, smiling blandly, "but a young man who——"

"*That* ain't no new express-man," returned the driver, in scornful deprecation of his interlocutor's ignorance. "He only took Hill's place from Montezuma. He's the new kid reviver and polisher for that university you're runnin' here. I say—you fellers oughter get him to tell you that story of Sam Barstow and the Chinaman. It'd limber you fellers up to hear it."

"I fear there's some extraordinary mistake here," said Mr. Peaseley, with a chilling Christian smile.

"Not a bit of it. He's got a letter from Sam for one of ye. Yere, Charley—what's your name! Come yere. Yere's all yer three bosses waiting for ye."

And the supposed express-man and late narrator of amusing stories came forward and presented his credentials as the assistant teacher of Pine Clearing.

CHAPTER II.

EVEN the practical Mr. Sperry was taken aback. The young man before him was squarely built, with broad shoulders, and a certain air of muscular activity. But his face, although good-humoured, was remarkable for offering not the slightest indication of studious preoccupation or mental training. A large mouth, light blue eyes, a square jaw, the other features being indistinctive—were immobile as a mask—except that, unlike a mask, they seemed to actually reflect the vacuity of the mood within, instead of concealing it. But as he saluted the trustees they each had the same feeling that even this expression was imported and not instinctive. His face was clean-shaven, and his hair cut so short as to suggest that a wig of some kind was necessary to give it characteristic or even ordinary human semblance.

His manner, self-assured, yet lacking reality, and his dress, of respectable cut and material, yet worn as if it did not belong to him, completed a picture as unlike a student or schoolmaster as could be possibly conceived.

Yet there was the letter in Mr. Peaseley's hands from Barstow, introducing Mr. Charles Twing as the first assistant teacher in the Pine Clearing Free Academy!

The three men looked hopelessly at each other. An air of fatigued righteousness and a desire to be spiritually at rest from other trials pervaded Mr. Peaseley. Whether or not the young man felt the evident objection he had raised, he assumed a careless position, with his back and elbows against the bar; but even the attitude was clearly not his own.

"Are you personally known to Mr. Barstow?" asked Sperry, with a slight business asperity.

"Yes."

"That is—you are quite well acquainted with him?"

"If you'd heard me gag his style a minute ago, so that everybody here knew who it was, you'd say so."

Mr. Peaseley's eyes sought the ceiling, and rested on the hanging lamp, as if nothing short of direct providential interference could meet the occasion. Yet, as the eyes of his brother trustees were bent on him expectantly, he nerved himself to say something.

"I suppose, Mr.—Mr. Twing, you have properly understood the great—I may say, very grave, intellectual, and moral responsibilities of the work you seek to undertake—and the necessity of supporting it by *example*, by practice, by personal influence both in the school and *out of it*. Sir, I presume, sir, you feel that you are fully competent to undertake this?"

"I reckon *he* does."

"*Who* does?"

"Sam Barstow, or he wouldn't have selected me. I presume" (with the slightest possible and almost instinctive imitation of the reverend gentleman's manner) "his head is considered level."

Mr. Peaseley withdrew his eyes from the ceiling. "I have," he said to his companions, with a pained smile, "an important choir meeting to attend this afternoon. I fear I must be excused." As he moved towards the door, the others formally following him until out of the stranger's hearing, he added, "I wash my hands of this. After so wanton and unseemly an exhibition of utter incompetency, and even of understanding of the trust imposed upon him—upon *us*—*my* conscience forbids me to interfere further. But the real arbiter in this matter will be—thank Heaven!—the mistress herself. You have only to confront her at once with this man. *Her* decision will be speedy and final. For even Mr. Barstow will not dare to force so outrageous a character upon a delicate, refined woman, in a familiar and confidential capacity."

"That's so," said Sperry eagerly; "she'll settle it."

"And, of course," added the millowner, "that will leave *us* out of any difficulty with Sam."

The two men returned to the hapless stranger, relieved, yet constrained by the sacrifice to which they felt they were leading him. It would be necessary, they said, to introduce him to his principal—Mrs. Martin—at once. They might still find her at the school-house—distant but a few steps. They said little else, the stranger keeping up an ostentatious whistling, and becoming more and more incongruous, they thought, as they neared the pretty school-house. Here they *did* find Mrs. Martin, who had naturally lingered after the interview with Sperry.

She came forward to meet them, with the nervous shyness and slightly fastidious hesitation that was her

nature. They saw, or fancied they saw, the same surprise and disappointment they had themselves experienced pass over her sensitive face as she looked at him; they felt that their vulgar charge appeared still more outrageous by contrast with this delicate woman and her pretty, refined surroundings; but they saw that *he* enjoyed it, and was even—if such a word could be applied to so self-conscious a man—more at ease in her presence!

"I reckon you and me will pull together very well, ma'am," he said confidently.

They looked to see her turn her back upon him, faint, or burst out crying, but she did neither, and only gazed at him quietly.

"It's a mighty pretty place you've got here—and I like it, and if *we* can't run it, I don't know who can. Only just let me know *what* you want, ma'am, and you can count on me every time."

To their profound consternation Mrs. Martin smiled faintly.

"It rests with *you* only, Mrs. Martin," said Sperry quickly and significantly. "It's *your* say, you know; you're the only one to be considered or consulted here."

"Only just say what you want me to do," continued Twing, apparently ignoring the trustees; "pick out the style of job; give me a hint or two how to work it, or what you'd think would be the proper gag to fetch 'em, and I'm there, ma'am. It may be new at first, but I'll get at the business of it quick enough."

Mrs. Martin smiled—this time quite perceptibly—with the least little colour in her cheeks and eyes. "Then you've had no experience in teaching?" she said.

"Well—no."

"You are not a graduate of any college?"

"Not much."

The two trustees looked at each other. Even Mr. Peaseley had not conceived such a damning revelation.

"Well," said Mrs. Martin slowly, "perhaps Mr. Twing had better *come early to-morrow morning and begin.*"

"Begin?" gasped Mr. Sperry in breathless astonishment.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Martin in timid explanation. "If he is new to the work, the sooner the better."

Mr. Sperry could only gaze blankly at his brother official. Had they heard aright? Was this the recklessness of nervous excitement in a woman of delicate health, or had the impostor cast some glamour upon her? Or was she frightened of Sam Barstow, and afraid to reject his candidate? The last thought was an inspiration. He drew her quickly aside. "One moment, Mrs. Martin! You said to me an hour ago that you didn't intend to have asked Mr. Barstow to send you an assistant. I hope that, merely because he *has* done so, you don't feel obliged to accept this man against your better judgment?"

"Oh no," said Mrs. Martin quietly.

The case seemed hopeless. And Sperry had the miserable conviction that by having insisted upon Mrs. Martin's judgment being final they had estopped their own right to object. But how could they have foreseen her extraordinary taste? He, however, roused himself for a last appeal.

"Mrs. Martin," he said in a lower voice, "I ought to tell you that the Rev. Mr. Peaseley strongly doubts the competency of that young man."

"Didn't Mr. Barstow make a selection at your request?" asked Mrs. Martin, with a faint little nervous cough.

"Yes—but——"

"Then his competency only concerns *me*—and I don't see what Mr. Peaseley has to say about it."

Could he believe his senses? There was a decided flush in the woman's pale face, and the first note of independence and asperity in her voice.

That night, in the privacy of his conjugal chamber, Mr. Sperry relieved his mind to another of the enigmatical sex—the stout South-Western partner of his joys and troubles. But the result was equally unsatisfactory. “Well, Abner,” said the lady, “I never could see, for all your men's praises of Mrs. Martin, what that feller can see in *her* to like!”

CHAPTER III.

MRS. MARTIN was early at the school-house the next morning, yet not so early but that she discovered that the new assistant had been there before her. This was shown in some rearrangement of the school seats and benches. They were placed so as to form a horse-shoe before her desk, and at the farther extremity of this semicircle was a chair evidently for himself. She was a little nettled at his premature action, although admitting the utility of the change, but she was still more annoyed at his absence at such a moment. It was nearly school hour when he appeared, to her surprise, marshalling a file of some of the smaller children whom he had evidently picked up *en route*, and who were to her greater surprise apparently on the best of terms with him. “Thought I'd better rake 'em in, introduce myself to 'em, and get 'em to know me before school begins. Excuse me,” he went on hastily, “but I've a lot more coming up, and I'd better make myself square with them *outside*.” But Mrs. Martin had apparently developed a certain degree of stiffness since their evening's interview.

"It seems to me quite as important, Mr. Twing," she said dryly, "that you should first learn some of your own duties, which I came here early to teach you."

"Not at all," he said cheerfully. "To-day I take my seat, as I've arranged it, you see, over there with them, and watch 'em go through the motions. One rehearsal's enough for *me*. At the same time I can chip in if necessary." And before she could reply he was out of the school-house again, hailing the new-comers. This was done with apparently such delight to the children and with some evidently imported expression into his smooth mask-like face, that Mrs. Martin had to content herself with watching him with equal curiosity. She was turning away with a sudden sense of forgotten dignity, when a shout of joyous, childish laughter attracted her attention to the window. The new assistant with half a dozen small children on his square shoulders, walking with bent back and every simulation of advanced senility, was evidently personating, with the assistance of astonishingly distorted features, the ogre of a Christmas pantomime. As his eye caught hers the expression vanished, the mask-like face returned; he set the children down, and moved away. And when school began, although he marshalled them triumphantly to the very door—with what contortion of face or simulation of character she was unable to guess—after he had entered the school-room and taken his seat every vestige of his previous facial aberration was gone, and only his usual solidity remained. In vain, as Mrs. Martin expected, the hundred delighted little eyes before her dwelt at first eagerly and hopefully upon his face, but, as she *had not* expected, recognising from the blankness of his demeanour that the previous performance was intended for them exclusively, the same eager eyes were presently dropped again upon their books in simple imita-

tion, as if he were one of themselves. Mrs. Martin breathed freely, and lessons began.

Yet she was nervously conscious, meanwhile, of a more ill-omened occurrence. This was the non-arrival of several of her oldest pupils, notably the refractory and incorrigible Pike County contingent to whom Sperry had alluded. For the past few days they had hovered on the verge of active insubordination, and had indulged in vague mutterings which she had resolutely determined not to hear. It was, therefore, with some inward trepidations, not entirely relieved by Twing's presence, that she saw the three Macinnons and the two Hardees slouch into the school a full hour after the lessons had begun. They did not even excuse themselves, but were proceeding with a surly and ostentatious defiance to their seats, when Mrs. Martin was obliged to look up, and—as the eldest Hardee filed before her—to demand an explanation. The culprit addressed—a dull, heavy-looking youth of nineteen—hesitated with an air of mingled doggedness and sheepishness; and then, without replying, nudged his companion. It was evidently a preconcerted signal of rebellion, for the boy nudged stopped, and turning a more intelligent, but equally dissatisfied face upon the schoolmistress, began determinedly:—

“Wot's our excuse for coming an hour late? Well, we ain't got none. *We* don't call it an hour late—*we* don't. We call it the right time. We call it the right time for *our* lessons, for we don't allow to come here to sing hymns with babbies. We don't want to know 'where, oh where, are the Hebrew children?' They ain't nothin' to us Americans. And we don't want any more Daniels in the Lions' Den played off on us. We have enough of 'em in Sunday-school. We ain't hankerin' much for grammar and dictionary hogwash, and we don't want no Boston parts o'

speech rung in on us the first thing in the mo'nin'. We ain't Boston—we're Pike County—we are. We reckon to do our sums, and our figgerin', and our sale and barter, and our interest tables and weights and measures when the time comes, and our geograffy when it's on, and our readin' and writin' and the American Constitution in reg'lar hours, and then we calkilate to git up and git afore the po'try, and the Boston airs and graces come round. That's our rights and what our fathers pay school taxes for, and we want 'em."

He stopped, looking less towards the schoolmistress than to his companions, for whom perhaps, after the schoolboy fashion, this attitude was taken. Mrs. Martin sat quite white and self-contained, with her eyes fixed on the frayed rim of the rebel's straw hat, which he still kept on his head. Then she said quietly—

"Take off your hat, sir."

The boy did not move.

"He can't," said a voice cheerfully.

It was the new assistant. The whole school faced rapidly towards him. The rebel leader and his followers, who had not noticed him before, stared at the interrupter, who did not, however, seem to exhibit any of the authority of office, but rather the comment and criticism of one of themselves. "Wot you mean?" said the boy indignantly.

"I mean you can't take off your hat because you've got some things stowed away in it you don't want seen," said Twing, with an immovable face.

"Wot things?" said the boy angrily. Then suddenly recollecting himself, he added, "Go along! You can't fool me! Think you'll make me take off my hat—don't you?"

"Well," said Twing, advancing to the side of the rebel,

"look here, then!" With a dexterous movement and a slight struggle from the boy, he lifted the hat. A half-dozen apples, a bird's nest, two birds' eggs, and a fluttering half-fledged bird fell from it. A wave of delight and astonishment ran along the benches, a blank look of hopeless bewilderment settled upon the boy's face, and the gravity of the situation disappeared for ever in the irrepressible burst of laughter, in which even his brother rebels joined. The smallest child who had been half-frightened, half-fascinated by the bold, bad, heroic attitude of the mutineer, was quick to see the ridiculousness of that figure crowned with cheap schoolboy plunder. The eloquent protest of his wrongs was lost in the ludicrous appearance of the protester. Even Mrs. Martin felt that nothing she could say at that moment could lift the rebellion into seriousness again. But Twing was evidently not satisfied.

"Beg Mrs. Martin's pardon, and say you were foolin' with the boys," he said in a low voice.

The discomfited rebel hesitated.

"Say it, or I'll *show what you've got in your pockets!*" said Twing, in a terribly significant aside.

The boy mumbled an apology to Mrs. Martin, scrambled in a blank, hopeless way to his seat, and the brief rebellion ignominiously ended. But two things struck Mrs. Martin as peculiar. She overheard the culprit say, with bated breath and evident sincerity, to his comrades, "Hadn't nothing in my hat, anyway!" and one of the infant class was heard to complain, in a deeply-injured way, that the bird's nest was *his*, and had been "stoled" from his desk. And there still remained the fact for which Twing's undoubted ascination over the children had somewhat prepared her—that at recess the malcontents, one and all, reemed to have forgiven the man who had overcome them,

and gathered round him with unmistakable interest. All this, however, did not blind her to the serious intent of the rebellion, or of Twing's unaccountable assumption of her prerogative. While he was still romping with the children she called him in.

"I must remind you," she said, with a slight nervous asperity, "that this outrageous conduct of Tom Hardee was evidently deliberated and prepared by the others, and cannot end in this way."

He looked at her with a face so exasperatingly expressionless that she could have slapped it as if it had belonged to one of the older scholars, and said, "But it *has* ended. It's a dead frost."

"I don't know what you mean; and I must remind you also that in this school we neither teach nor learn slang."

His immobile face changed for an instant to a look of such decided admiration that she felt her colour rise; but he wiped his expression away with his hand as if it had been some artificial make-up, and said awkwardly, but earnestly—

"Excuse me—won't you? But look here, Mrs. Martin. I found out early this morning, when I was squaring myself with the other children, that there was this row hangin' on—in fact, that there was a sort of idea that Pike County wasn't having a fair show—excuse me—in the running of the school, and that Peaseley and Barstow were a little too much on in every scene. In fact, you see, it was just what Tom said."

"This is insufferable," said Mrs. Martin, her eyes growing darker as her cheeks grew red. "They shall go home to their parents, and tell them from me——"

"That they're all mistaken—excuse me—but that's just what *they're goin' to do*. I tell you, Mrs. Martin, their little

game's busted—I beg pardon—but it's all over. You'll have no more trouble with them."

"And you think that just because you found Tom had something in his hat, and exposed him?" said Mrs. Martin scornfully.

"Tom *hadn't* anything in his hat," said Twing, wiping his mouth slowly.

"Nothing?" repeated Mrs. Martin.

"No."

"But I *saw* you take the things out."

"That was only a *trick*! He had nothing except what I had up my sleeve, and forced on him. He knew it, and that frightened him, and made him look like a fool, and so bursted up his conspiracy. There's nothin' boys are more afraid of than ridicule, or the man or boy that makes 'em ridiculous."

"I won't ask you if you call this *fair* to the boy, Mr. Twing?" said Mrs. Martin hotly; "but is this your idea of discipline?"

"I call it fair, because Tom knew it was some kind of a trick, and wasn't deceived. I call it discipline if it made him do what was right afterwards, and makes him afraid or unwilling to do anything to offend me or you again. He likes me none the worse for giving him a chance of being laughed out of a thing instead of being *driven* out of it. And," he added, with awkward earnestness, "if you'll just leave all this to *me*, and only consider me here to take this sort of work—which ain't a lady's—off your hands, we'll just strike our own line between the Peaseleys and Pike County—and run this school in spite of both."

A little mollified, a good deal puzzled, and perhaps more influenced by the man's manner than she had imagined, Mrs. Martin said nothing, but let the day pass without dismissing the offenders. And on returning home that

evening she was considerably surprised to receive her landlady's extravagant congratulations on the advent of her new assistant. "And they do say, Mrs. Martin," continued that lady enthusiastically, "that your just setting your foot down square on that Peaseley and that Barstow, *both of 'em*—and choosing your own assistant yourself—a plain young fellow with no frills and fancies, but one that you could set about making all the changes you like, was just the biggest thing you ever did for Pine Clearing."

"And—they—consider him quite—competent?" said Mrs. Martin, with timid colour and a hesitating audacity.

"Competent! You ask my Johnny."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Martin was somewhat formally early at the school-house the next morning. "Perhaps," she said, with an odd mixture of dignity and timidity, "we'd better, before school commences, go over the lessons for the day."

"I *have*," he said quickly. "I told you *one* rehearsal was enough for me."

"You mean you have looked over them?"

"Got 'em by heart. Letter perfect. Want to hear me? Listen."

She did. He had actually committed to memory, and without a lapse, the entire text of rules, questions, answers, and examples of the lessons for the day.

CHAPTER IV.

BEFORE a month had passed, Mr. Twing's success was secure and established. So were a few of the changes he had quietly instituted. The devotional singing and Scripture reading which had excited the discontent of the Pike

County children and their parents was not discontinued, but half an hour before recess was given up to some secular choruses, patriotic or topical, in which the little ones under Twing's really wonderful practical tuition exhibited such quick and pleasing proficiency, that a certain negro minstrel camp-meeting song attained sufficient popularity to be lifted by general accord to promotion to the devotional exercises, where it eventually ousted the objectionable "Hebrew children" on the question of melody alone. Grammar was still taught at Pine Clearing School in spite of the Hardees and Mackinnons, but Twing had managed to import into the cognate exercises of recitation a wonderful degree of enthusiasm and excellence. Dialectical Pike County, that had refused to recognise the governing powers of the nominative case, nevertheless came out strong in classical elocution; and Tom Hardee, who had delivered his ungrammatical protest on behalf of Pike County, was no less strong, if more elegant, in his impeachment of Warren Hastings as Edmund Burke, with the equal sanction of his parents. The trustees, Sperry and Jackson, had marvelled, but were glad enough to accept the popular verdict—only Mr. Peaseley still retained an attitude of martyr-like forbearance and fatigued toleration towards the new assistant and his changes. As to Mrs. Martin, she seemed to accept the work of Mr. Twing after his own definition of it—as of a masculine quality ill-suited to a lady's tastes and inclinations; but it was noticeable that while she had at first repelled any criticism of him whatever, she had lately been given to explaining his position to her friends, and had spoken of him with somewhat laboured and ostentatious patronage. Yet when they were alone together she frankly found him very amusing, and his presumption and vulgarity so clearly unintentional that it no longer offended her. They were good friends with-

out having any confidences beyond the duties of the school; she had asked no further explanation of the fact that he had been selected by Mr. Barstow, without reference to any special antecedent training. What his actual antecedents were she had never cared to know, nor he apparently to reveal; that he had been engaged in some other occupations of superior or inferior quality would not have been remarkable in a community where the principal lawyer had been a soldier, and the miller a doctor. The fact that he admired her was plain enough to *her*; that it pleased her, but carried with it no ulterior thought or responsibility, might have been equally clear to others. Perhaps it was so to *him*.

Howbeit, this easy mutual intercourse was one day interrupted by what seemed a trifling incident. The piano which Mr. Barstow had promised duly made its appearance in the school-house, to the delight of the scholars and the gentle satisfaction of Mrs. Martin, who, in addition to the rudimentary musical instruction of the younger girls, occasionally played upon it herself in a prim, refined, and conscientious fashion. To this, when she was alone after school hours, she sometimes added a faint, colourless voice of limited range and gentlewomanly expression. It was on one of these occasions that Twing, becoming an accidental auditor of this chaste, sad piping, was not only permitted to remain to hear the end of a love song of strictly guarded passion in the subjunctive mood, but at the close was invited to try his hand—a quick, if not a cultivated one—at the instrument. He did so. Like her, he added his voice. Like hers, it was a love song. But there the similitude ended. Negro in dialect, illiterate in construction, idiotic in passion, and presumably addressed to the “Rose of Alabama,” in the very extravagance of its childish infatuation it might have been a mockery of the

schoolmistress's song but for one tremendous fact! In unrestrained feeling, pathetic yearning, and exquisite tenderness of expression, it was unmistakably and appallingly personal and sincere. It was true the lips spoken of were "lubly," the eyes alluded to were like "lightenin' bugs," but from the voice and gestures of the singer Mrs. Martin confusedly felt that they were intended for *hers*, and even the refrain that "she dressed so neat and looked so sweet" was glaringly allusive to her own modish mourning. Alternately flushing and paling, with a hysteric smile hovering round her small reserved mouth, the unfortunate gentlewoman was fain to turn to the window to keep her countenance until it was concluded. She did not ask him to repeat it, nor did she again subject herself to this palpable serenade, but a few days afterwards, as she was idly striking the keys in the interval of a music lesson, one of her little pupils broke out, "Why, Mrs. Martin, if yo' ain't a pickin' out that pow'ful pretty tune that Mr. Twing sings!"

Nevertheless, when Twing, a week or two later, suggested that he might sing the same song as a solo at a certain performance to be given by the school-children in aid of a local charity, she dryly intimated that it was hardly of a character to suit the entertainment. "But," she added more gently, "you recite so well; why not give a recitation?"

He looked at her with questioning and troubled eyes—the one expression he seemed to have lately acquired. "But that would be *in public*! There'll be a lot of people there," he said doubtfully.

A little amused at this first apparent sign of a want of confidence in himself, she said, with a reassuring smile, "So much the better—you do it really too well to have it thrown away entirely on children."

"Do *you* wish it?" he said suddenly.

Somewhat confused, but more irritated by his abruptness, she replied, "Why not?" But when the day came, and before a crowded audience, in which there was a fair sprinkling of strangers, she regretted her rash suggestion. For when the pupils had gone through certain calisthenic exercises—admirably taught and arranged by him—and "spoken their pieces," he arose, and fixing his eyes on her, began Othello's defence before the Duke and Council. Here, as on the previous occasion, she felt herself personally alluded to in his account of his wooing. Desdemona, for some occult reason, vicariously appeared for her in the unwarrantable picture of his passion, and to this was added the absurd consciousness which she could not put aside that the audience, following with enthusiasm his really strong declamation, was also following his suggestion and adopting it. Yet she was also conscious, and, as she thought, as inconsistently, of being pleased and even proud of his success. At the conclusion the applause was general, and a voice added with husky admiration and familiarity—

"Brayvo, Johnny Walker!"

Twing's face became suddenly white as a Pierrot mask. There was a dead silence, in which the voice continued, "Give us 'Sugar in the Gourd,' Johnny."

A few hisses, and cries of "Hush!" "Put him out!" followed. Mrs. Martin raised her eyes quickly to where her assistant had stood bowing his thanks a moment before. He was gone!

More concerned than she cared to confess, vaguely fearful that she was in some way connected with his abrupt withdrawal, and perhaps a little remorseful that she had allowed her personal feelings to interfere with her frank recognition of his triumph, she turned back to the school-

room, after the little performers and their audience had departed, in the hope that he might return. It was getting late, the nearly level rays of the sun were lying on the empty benches at the lower end of the room, but the desk where she sat with its lid raised was in deep shadow. Suddenly she heard his voice in a rear hall, but it was accompanied by another's—the same voice which had interrupted the applause. Before she could either withdraw, or make herself known, the two men had entered the room, and were passing slowly through it. She understood at once that Twing had slipped out into a janitor's room in the rear, where he had evidently forced an interview and explanation from his interrupter, and now had been waiting for the audience to disperse before emerging by the front door. They had evidently overlooked her in the shadow.

"But," said the stranger, as if following an aggrieved line of apology, "if Barstow knew who you were, and what you'd done, and still thought you good enough to rastle round here and square up them Pike County fellers and them kids—what in thunder do you care if the others *do* find you out, as long as Barstow sticks to you?"

"I've told you why, Dick," returned Twing gloomily.

"Oh, the schoolma'am!"

"Yes, she's a saint, an angel. More than that—she's a lady, Dick, to the tip of her fingers, who knows nothing of the world outside a parson's study. She took me on trust—without a word—when the trustees hung back and stared. She's never asked me about myself, and now, when she knows who and what I have been—she'll loathe me."

"But look here, Jim," said the stranger anxiously. "I'll say it's all a lie. I'll come here and apologise to you afore *her*, and say I took you for somebody else; I'll——"

"It's too late," said Twing moodily.

"And what'll you do?"

"Leave here."

They had reached the door together. To Mrs. Martin's terror, as the stranger passed out, Twing, instead of following him as she expected, said "Good night," and gloomily re-entered the school-room. Here he paused a moment, and then throwing himself on one of the benches, dropped his head upon a desk with his face buried in his hands—like a very schoolboy.

What passed through Mrs. Martin's mind I know not. For a moment she sat erect and rigid at her desk. Then she slipped quietly down, and, softly as one of the last shadows cast by the dying sun, glided across the floor to where he sat.

"Mrs. Martin," he said, starting to his feet.

"I have heard all," she said faintly. "I couldn't help it. I was here when you came in. But I want to tell you that I am content to know you only as you seem to be—as I have always found you here—strong and loyal to a duty laid upon you by those who had a full knowledge of all you had been."

"Did you? Do you know what I have been?"

Mrs. Martin looked frightened, trembled a moment, and, recovering herself with an effort, said gently, "I know nothing of your past."

"Nothing?" he repeated, with a mirthless attempt at laughter, and a quick breath. "Not that I've been a—a—mountebank, a variety actor—a clown, you know, for the amusement of the lowest, at 25 cents a ticket. That I'm 'Johnny Walker,' the song and dance man—the all-round man—selected by Mr. Barstow to teach these boors a lesson as to what they wanted!"

She looked at him a moment—timidly, yet thoughtfully. "Then you are an actor—a person who simulates what he does not feel?"

"Yes."

"And all the time you have been here you have been acting the schoolmaster—playing a part—for—for Mr. Barstow?"

"Yes."

"Always?"

"Yes."

The colour came softly to her face again, and her voice was very low. "And when you sang to me that day, and when you looked at me—as you did—an hour or two ago—while you were entertaining—you were—only—acting?"

Mr. Twing's answer was not known, but it must have been a full and complete one, for it was quite dark when he left the school-room—*not* for the last time—with its mistress on his arm.

In a Pioneer Restaurant.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was probably no earthly reason why the "Poco Mas o Menos" Club of San Francisco should have ever existed, or why its five harmless, indistinctive members should not have met and dined together as ordinary individuals. Still less was there any justification for the gratuitous opinion which obtained, that it was bold, bad, and brilliant. Looking back upon it over a quarter of a century and half a globe, I confess I cannot recall a single witticism, audacity, or humorous characteristic that belonged to it. Yet there was no doubt that we were thought to be extremely critical and satirical, and I am inclined to think we honestly believed it. To take our seats on Wednesdays and Saturdays at a specially reserved table at the restaurant we patronised, to be conscious of being observed by the other guests, and of our waiter confidentially imparting our fame to strangers behind the shaken-out folds of a napkin, and of knowing that the faintest indication of merriment from our table thrilled the other guests with anticipatory smiles, was, I am firmly convinced, all that we ever did to justify our reputations. Nor, strictly speaking, were we remarkable as individuals; an assistant-editor, a lawyer, a young army quartermaster, a bank clerk, and a mining secretary—we could not separately challenge any special social or literary distinction. Yet I am satisfied that the very name of our

Club—a common Spanish colloquialism, literally meaning “a little more or less,” and adopted in Californian slang to express an unknown quantity—was supposed to be replete with deep and convulsing humour.

My impression is that our extravagant reputation, and, indeed, our continued existence as a club, was due solely to the proprietor of the restaurant and two of his waiters, and that we were actually “run” by them. When the suggestion of our meeting regularly there was first broached to the proprietor—a German of slow but deep emotions—he received it with a “So” of such impressive satisfaction that it might have been the beginning of our vainglory. From that moment he became at once our patron and our devoted slave. To linger near our table once or twice during dinner with an air of respectful vacuity—as of one who knew himself too well to be guilty of the presumption of attempting to understand our brilliancy—to wear a certain parental pride and unconsciousness in our fame, and yet to never go further in seeming to comprehend it than to obligingly translate the name of the Club as “a leedle more and nod quide so much”—was to him sufficient happiness. That he ever experienced any business profit from the custom of the Club, or its advertisement, may be greatly doubted; on the contrary, that a few plain customers, nettled at our self-satisfaction, might have resented his favouritism seemed more probable. Equally vague, disinterested, and loyal was the attachment of the two waiters—one an Italian, faintly reminiscent of better days and possibly superior extraction; the other a rough but kindly Western man, who might have taken this menial position from temporary stress of circumstances, yet who continued in it from sheer dominance of habit and some feebleness of will. They both vied with each other to please us. It may have been they considered their attendance upon a reputed intel-

lectual company less degrading than ministering to the purely animal and silent wants of the average customers. It may have been that they were attracted by our general youthfulness. Indeed, I am inclined to think that they themselves were much more distinctive and interesting than any members of the Club, and it is to introduce *them* that I venture to recall so much of its history.

A few months after our advent at the restaurant, one evening, Joe Tallant, the mining secretary, one of our liveliest members, was observed to be awkward and distraught during dinner, forgetting even to offer the usual gratuity to the Italian waiter who handed him his hat, although he stared at him with an imbecile smile. As we chanced to leave the restaurant together, I was rallying him upon his abstraction, when to my surprise he said gravely, "Look here, one of two things has got to happen: either we must change our restaurant or I'm going to resign."

"Why?"

"Well, to make matters clear, I'm obliged to tell you something that in our business we usually keep a secret. About three weeks ago I had a notice to transfer twenty feet of Gold Hill to a fellow named 'Tournelli.' Well, Tournelli happened to call for it himself, and who the devil do you suppose Tournelli was? Why, our Italian waiter. I was regularly startled, and so was he. But business is business; so I passed him over the stock and said nothing—nor did he—neither there nor here. Day before yesterday he had thirty feet more transferred to him, and sold out."

"Well?" I said impatiently.

"Well," repeated Tallant indignantly, "Gold Hill's worth 600 dollars a foot. That's 18,000 dollars cash. And a man who's good enough for that much money is too good to wait upon me. Fancy a man who could pay my whole

year's salary with five feet of stock slinging hash to *me*. Fancy *you* tipping him with a quarter!"

"But if *he* don't mind it—and prefers to continue a waiter—why should *you* care? And *we're* not supposed to know."

"That's just it," groaned Tallant. "That's just where the sell comes in. Think how he must chuckle over us! No, sir! There's nothing aristocratic about me; but, by thunder, if I can't eat my dinner, and feel I am as good as the man who waits on me, I'll resign from the Club."

After endeavouring to point out to him the folly of such a proceeding, I finally suggested that we should take the other members of our Club into our confidence, and abide by their decision, to which he agreed. But, to his chagrin, the others, far from participating in his delicacy, seemed to enjoy Tournelli's unexpected wealth with a vicarious satisfaction and increase of dignity as if we were personally responsible for it. Although it had been unanimously agreed that we should make no allusions, jocose or serious, to him, nor betray any knowledge of it before him, I am afraid our attitude at the next dinner was singularly artificial. A nervous expectancy when he approached us, and a certain restraint during his presence, a disposition to check any discussion of shares or "strikes" in mining, lest he should think it personal, an avoidance of unnecessary or trifling "orders," and a singular patience in awaiting their execution when given; a vague hovering between sympathetic respect and the other extreme of indifferent bluntness in our requests, tended, I think, to make that meal far from exhilarating. Indeed, the unusual depression affected the unfortunate cause of it, who added to our confusion by increased solicitude of service and—as if fearful of some fault, or having incurred our disfavour—by a deprecatory and

exaggerated humility that in our sensitive state seemed like the keenest irony. At last, evidently interpreting our constraint before him into a desire to be alone, he retired to the door of a distant pantry, whence he surveyed us with dark and sorrowful Southern eyes. Tallant, who in this general embarrassment had been imperfectly served, and had eaten nothing, here felt his grievance reach its climax, and in a sudden outbreak of recklessness he roared out, "Hi, waiter—you, Tournelli. He may," he added, turning darkly to us, "buy up enough stock to control the board and dismiss *me*; but, by thunder, if it costs me my place, I'm going to have some more chicken!"

It was probably this sensitiveness that kept us from questioning him, even indirectly, and perhaps led us into the wildest surmises. He was acting secretly for a brotherhood or society of waiters; he was a silent partner of his German employer; he was a disguised Italian stockbroker, gaining "points" from the unguarded conversation of "operating" customers; he was a political refugee with capital; he was a fugitive Sicilian bandit, investing his ill-gotten gains in California; he was a dissipated young nobleman, following some amorous intrigue across the ocean, and acting as his own Figaro or Leporello. I think a majority of us favoured the latter hypothesis, possibly because we were young, and his appearance gave it colour. His thin black moustaches and dark eyes, we felt, were Tuscan and aristocratic; at least, they were like the baritone who played those parts, and *he* ought to know. Yet nothing could be more exemplary and fastidious than his conduct towards the few lady frequenters of the "Poodle Dog" restaurant, who, I regret to say, were not puritanically reserved or conventual in manner.

But an unexpected circumstance presently changed and

divided our interest. It was alleged by Clay, the assistant editor, that entering the restaurant one evening he saw the back and tails of a coat that seemed familiar to him half filling a doorway leading to the restaurant kitchen. It was unmistakably the figure of one of our Club members—the young lawyer—Jack Manners. But what was he doing there? While the Editor was still gazing after him, he suddenly disappeared, as if some one had warned him that he was observed. As he did not reappear, when Tournelli entered from the kitchen a few moments later, the Editor called him and asked for his fellow-member. To his surprise the Italian answered, with every appearance of truthfulness, that he had not seen Mr. Manners at all! The Editor was staggered; but as he chanced, some hours later, to meet Manners, he playfully rallied him on his mysterious conference with the Italian. Manners replied briefly that he had had no interview whatever with Tournelli, and changed the subject quickly. The mystery—as we persisted in believing it—was heightened when another member deposed that he had seen “Tom,” the Western waiter, coming from Manners’s office. As Manners had volunteered no information of this, we felt that we could not without indelicacy ask him if Tom was a client, or a messenger from Tournelli. The only result was that our Club dinner was even more constrained than before. Not only was “Tom” now invested with a dark importance, but it was evident that the harmony of the Club was destroyed by these singular secret relations of two of its members with their *employés*.

It chanced that one morning, arriving from a delayed journey, I dropped into the restaurant. It was that slack hour between the lingering breakfast and coming luncheon, when the tables are partly stripped, and unknown doors,

opened for ventilation, reveal the distant kitchen, and a mingled flavour of cold coffee-grounds and lukewarm soups hangs heavy on the air. To this cheerlessness was added a gusty rain without, that filmed the panes of the windows and doors, and veiled from the passer-by the usual tempting display of snowy cloths and china.

As I seemed to be the only customer at that hour, I selected a table by the window for distraction. Tom had taken my order; the other waiters, including Tournelli, were absent, with the exception of a solitary German, who, in the interlude of perfunctory trifling with the castors, gazed at me with that abstracted irresponsibility which one waiter assumes towards another's customer. Even the proprietor had deserted his desk at the counter. It seemed to be a favourable opportunity to get some information from Tom.

But he anticipated me. When he had dealt a certain number of dishes around me, as if they were cards and he was telling my fortune, he leaned over the table and said, with interrogating confidence—

“I reckon you call that Mr. Manners of yours a good lawyer?”

We were very loyal to each other in the Club, and I replied with youthful enthusiasm that he was considered one of the most promising at the bar. And, remembering Tournelli, I added confidently that whoever engaged him to look after their property interests had secured a treasure.

“But is he good in criminal cases—before a police-court, for instance?” continued Tom.

I believed—I don't know on what grounds—that Manners was good in insurance and Admiralty law, and that he looked upon criminal practice as low; but I answered briskly—though a trifle startled—that as a criminal lawyer he was perfect.

"He could advise a man, who had a row hanging on, how to steer clear of being up for murder—eh?"

I trusted, with a desperate attempt at jocosity, that neither he nor Tournelli had been doing anything to require Manners's services in that way.

"It would be too late, *then*," said Tom coolly, "and *anybody* could tell a man what he ought to have done, or how to make the best of what he had done; but the smart thing in a lawyer would be to give a chap points *beforehand*, and sorter tell him how far he could go, and yet keep inside the law. How he might goad a fellow to draw on him, and then plug him—eh?"

I looked up quickly. There was nothing in his ordinary, good-humoured, but not very strong face to suggest that he himself was the subject of this hypothetical case. If he were speaking for Tournelli, the Italian certainly was not to be congratulated on his ambassador's prudence; and, above all, Manners was to be warned of the interpretation which might be put upon his counsels, and disseminated thus publicly. As I was thinking what to say, he moved away, but suddenly returned again.

"What made you think Tournelli had been up to anything?" he asked sharply.

"Nothing," I answered; "I only thought you and he, being friends——"

"You mean we're both waiters in the same restaurant. Well, I don't know him any better than I know that chap over there," pointing to the other waiter. "He's a Greaser or an Italian, and, I reckon, goes with his kind."

Why had we not thought of this before? Nothing would be more natural than that the rich and imperious Tournelli should be exclusive, and have no confidences with his enforced associates. And it was evident that Tom had noticed it, and was jealous.

"I suppose he's rather a swell, isn't he?" I suggested tentatively.

A faint smile passed over Tom's face. It was partly cynical, and partly suggestive of that amused toleration of our youthful credulity which seemed to be a part of that discomposing patronage that everybody extended to the Club. As he said nothing, I continued encouragingly—

"Because a man's a waiter, it doesn't follow that he's always been one, or always will be."

"No," said Tom, abstractedly; "but it's about as good as anything else to lie low and wait on." But here two customers entered, and he turned to them, leaving me in doubt whether to accept this as a verbal pleasantry or an admission. Only one thing seemed plain: I had certainly gained no information, and only added a darker mystery to his conference with Manners, which I determined I should ask Manners to explain.

I finished my meal in solitude. The rain was still beating drearily against the windows, with an occasional accession of impulse that seemed like human impatience. Vague figures under dripping umbrellas, that hid their faces as if in premeditated disguise, hurried from the main thoroughfare. A woman in a hooded waterproof like a domino, a Mexican in a black *serape*, might have been stage conspirators hastening to a rendezvous. The cavernous chill and odour which I had before noted as coming from some sarcophagus of larder or oven, where "funeral baked meats" might have been kept in stock, began to oppress me. The hollow and fictitious domesticity of this common board had never before seemed so hopelessly displayed. And Tom the waiter, his napkin twisted in his hand and his face turned with a sudden

dark abstraction towards the window, appeared to be really "lying low," and waiting for something outside his avocation.

CHAPTER II.

THE fact that Tom did not happen to be on duty at the next Club dinner gave me an opportunity to repeat his mysterious remark to Manners, and to jokingly warn that rising young lawyer against the indiscretion of vague counsel. Manners, however, only shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know what he meant," he said carelessly; "but since *he* chooses to talk of his own affairs publicly, *I* don't mind saying that they are neither very weighty nor very dangerous. It's only the old story: the usual matrimonial infidelities that are mixed up with the Californian emigration. He leaves the regular wife behind—fairly or unfairly, I can't say. She gets tired waiting, after the usual style, and elopes with somebody else. The Western Penelope isn't built for waiting. But she seems to have converted some of his property into cash when she skipped from St. Louis, and that's where his chief concern comes in. That's what he wanted to see me for; that's why he inveigled me into that infernal pantry of his one day to show me a plan of his property, as if that was any good."

He paused disgustedly. We all felt, I think, that Tom was some kind of an impostor, claiming the sympathies of the Club on false pretences. Nevertheless, the Quartermaster said, "Then you didn't do anything for him—give him any advice, eh?"

"No; for the property's as much hers as his, and he hasn't got a divorce; and, as it's doubtful whether he

didn't desert her first, he can't get one. He was surprised," he added, with a grim smile, "when I told him that he was obliged to support her, and was even liable for her debts. But people who are always talking of invoking the law know nothing about it." We were surprised too, although Manners was always convincing us, in some cheerful but discomposing way, that we were all daily and hourly, in our simplest acts, making ourselves responsible for all sorts of liabilities and actions, and even generally preparing ourselves for arrest and imprisonment. The Quartermaster continued lazily—

"Then you didn't give him any points about shooting?"

"No; he doesn't even know the man she went off with. It was eighteen months ago, and I don't believe he'd even know her again if he met her. But, if he isn't much of a client, we shall miss him to-night as a waiter, for the place is getting full, and there are not enough to serve."

The restaurant was, indeed, unusually crowded that evening; the more so that, the private rooms above being early occupied, some dinner parties and exclusive couples had been obliged to content themselves with the public dining saloon. A small table nearest us, usually left vacant to ensure a certain seclusion to the Club, was arranged, with a deprecatory apology from the proprietor, for one of those couples, a man and woman. The man was a well-known speculator—cool, yet reckless and pleasure-loving; the woman, good-looking, picturesquely attractive, self-conscious, and self-possessed. Our proximity was evidently neither novel nor discomposing. As she settled her skirts in her place, her bright, dark eyes swept our table with a frank, almost childish, familiarity. The younger members of the Club quite unconsciously pulled up their collars and settled their neckties; the elders as unconsciously raised their voices

slightly, and somewhat arranged their sentences. Alas! the simplicity and unaffectedness of the Club were again invaded.

Suddenly there was a crash, the breaking of glass, and an exclamation. Tournelli, no doubt disorganised by the unusual hurry, on his way to our table had dropped his tray, impartially distributed a plate of asparagus over an adjoining table, and, flushed and nervous, yet with an affectation of studied calmness, was pouring the sauce into the young Quartermaster's plate, in spite of his languid protests. At any other time we would have laughed, but there was something in the exaggerated agitation of the Italian that checked our mirth. Why should he be so upset by a trifling accident? He could afford to pay for the breakage; he would laugh at dismissal. Was it the sensitiveness of a refined nature, or—he was young and good-looking—was he disconcerted by the fact that our handsome neighbour had witnessed his awkwardness? But she was not laughing, and, as far as I could see, was intently regarding the bill of fare.

"Waiter!" called her companion, hailing Tournelli. "Here!" The Italian, with a face now distinctly white, leaned over the table, adjusting the glasses, but did not reply.

"Waiter!" repeated the stranger sharply. Tournelli's face twitched, then became set as a mask; but he did not move. The stranger leaned forward and pulled his apron from behind. Tournelli started with flashing eyes, and turned swiftly round. But the Quartermaster's hand had closed on his wrist.

"That's my knife, Tournelli."

The knife dropped from the Italian's fingers.

"Better see *what* he wants. It may not be *that*," said the young officer, coolly but kindly.

Tournelli turned impatiently towards the stranger. We alone had witnessed this incident, and were watching him breathlessly. Yet what bade fair a moment ago to be a tragedy, seemed now to halt grotesquely. For Tournelli, throwing open his linen jacket with a melodramatic gesture, tapped his breast, and with flashing eyes and suppressed accents, said, "Sare; you wantah me? Look—I am herre!"

The speculator leaned back in his chair in good-humoured astonishment. The lady's black eyes, without looking at Tournelli, glanced backward round the room, and slipped along our table, with half-defiant unconcern; and then she uttered a short hysterical laugh.

"Ah! ze lady—madame—ze signora—eh—she wantah me?" continued Tournelli, leaning on the table with compressed fingers, and glaring at her. "Perhaps *she* wantah Tournelli—eh?"

"Well, you might bring some with the soup," blandly replied her escort, who seemed to enjoy the Italian's excitement as a national eccentricity; "but hurry up and set the table, will you?"

Then followed, on the authority of the Editor, who understood Italian, a singular scene. Secure, apparently, in his belief that his language was generally uncomprehended, Tournelli brought a decanter, and, setting it on the table, said, "Traïtress!" in an intense whisper. This was followed by the cruets, which he put down with the exclamation, "Perjured fiend!" Two glasses, placed on either side of her, carried the word "Apostate!" to her ear; and three knives and forks, rattling more than was necessary, and laid crosswise before her plate, were accompanied with "Tremble, wanton!" Then, as he pulled the tablecloth straight, and ostentatiously concealed a wine-stain with a clean napkin, scarcely whiter than his

lips, he articulated under his breath, "Let him beware! he goes not hence alive! I will slice his craven heart—thus—and thou shalt see it." He turned quickly to a side table and brought back a spoon. "And *this* is why I have not found you;" another spoon, "For *this* you have disappeared;" a purely perfunctory polishing of her fork, "For *him*, bah!" an equally unnecessary wiping of her glass, "Blood of God!"—more wiping—"It will end! Yes"—general wiping and a final flourish over the whole table with a napkin—"I go, but at the door I shall await you both."

She had not spoken yet, nor even lifted her eyes. When she did so, however, she raised them level with his, showed all her white teeth—they were small and cruel-looking—and said smilingly in his own dialect—

"Thief!"

Tournelli halted, rigid.

"You're talking his lingo, eh?" said her escort good-humouredly.

"Yes."

"Well—tell him to bustle around and be a little livelier with the dinner, won't you? This is only skirmishing."

"You hear," she continued to Tournelli in a perfectly even voice; "or shall it be a policeman, and a charge of stealing?"

"Stealing!" gasped Tournelli. "*You* say stealing!"

"Yes—ten thousand dollars. You are well disguised here, my little fellow; it is a good business—yours. Keep it while you can."

I think he would have sprung upon her there and then, but that the Quartermaster, who was nearest him, and had been intently watching his face, made a scarcely perceptible movement as if ready to anticipate him. He

caught the officer's eye ; caught, I think, in ours the revelation that he had been understood, drew back with a sidelong, sinuous movement, and disappeared in the passage to the kitchen.

I believe we all breathed more freely, although the situation was still full enough of impending possibilities to prevent peaceful enjoyment of our dinner. As the Editor finished his hurried translation, it was suggested that we ought to warn the unsuspecting escort of Tournelli's threats. But it was pointed out that this would be betraying the woman, and that Jo Hays (her companion) was fully able to take care of himself. "Besides," said the Editor aggrievedly, "you fellows only think of *yourselves*, and you don't understand the first principles of journalism. Do you suppose I'm going to do anything to spoil a half-column of leaded brevier copy—from an eye-witness, too? No ; it's a square enough fight as it stands. We must look out for the woman, and not let Tournelli get an unfair drop on Hays. That is, if the whole thing isn't a bluff."

But the Italian did not return. Whether he had incontinently fled, or was nursing his wrath in the kitchen, or already fulfilling his threat of waiting on the pavement outside the restaurant, we could not guess. Another waiter appeared with the dinners they had ordered. A momentary thrill of excitement passed over us at the possibility that Tournelli had poisoned their soup ; but it presently lapsed, as we saw the couple partaking of it comfortably, and chatting with apparent unconcern. Was the scene we had just witnessed only a piece of Southern exaggeration? Was the woman a creature devoid of nerves or feeling of any kind ; or was she simply a consummate actress? Yet she was clearly not acting, for in the intervals of conversation, and even while talking,

her dark eyes wandered carelessly around the room, with the easy self-confidence of a pretty woman. We were beginning to talk of something else, when the Editor said suddenly, in a suppressed voice—

“Hullo! What’s the matter now?”

The woman had risen, and was hurriedly throwing her cloak over her shoulders. But it was *her* face that was now ashen and agitated, and we could see that her hands were trembling. Her escort was assisting her, but was evidently as astonished as ourselves. “Perhaps,” he suggested hopefully, “if you wait a minute it will pass off.”

“No, no,” she gasped, still hurriedly wrestling with her cloak. “Don’t you see I’m suffocating here—I want air. You can follow!” She began to move off, her face turned fixedly in the direction of the door. We instinctively looked there—perhaps for Tournelli. There was no one. Nevertheless, the Editor and Quartermaster had half risen from their seats.

“Halloo!” said Manners suddenly. “There’s Tom just come in. Call him!”

Tom, evidently recalled from his brief furlough by the proprietor on account of the press of custom, had just made his appearance from the kitchen.

“Tom, where’s Tournelli?” asked the lawyer hurriedly, but following the retreating woman with his eyes.

“Skipped, they say. Somebody insulted him,” said Tom curtly.

“You didn’t see him hanging round outside, eh? Swearing vengeance?” asked the Editor.

“No,” said Tom scornfully.

The woman had reached the door, and darted out of it as her escort paused a moment at the counter to throw down a coin. Yet in that moment she had hurried before him through the passage into the street. I turned breath-

lessly to the window. For an instant her face, white as a phantom's, appeared pressed rigidly against the heavy plate-glass, her eyes staring with a horrible fascination back into the room—I even imagined at us. Perhaps, as it was evident that Tournelli was not with her, she fancied he was still here; perhaps she had mistaken Tom for him! However, her escort quickly rejoined her; their shadows passed the window together—they were gone.

Then a pistol-shot broke the quiet of the street.

The Editor and Quartermaster rose and ran to the door. Manners rose also, but lingered long enough to whisper to me, "Don't lose sight of Tom," and followed them. But to my momentary surprise no one else moved. I had forgotten, in the previous excitement, that in those days a pistol-shot was not unusual enough to attract attention. A few raised their heads at the sound of running feet on the pavement, and the flitting of black shadows past the windows. Tom had not stirred, but, napkin in hand, and eyes fixed on vacancy, was standing, as I had seen him once before, in an attitude of listless expectation.

In a few minutes Manners returned. I thought he glanced oddly at Tom, who was still lingering in attendance, and I even fancied he talked to us ostentatiously for his benefit. "Yes, it was a row of Tournelli's. He was waiting at the corner; had rushed at Hays with a knife, but had been met with a derringer-shot through his hat. The lady, who, it seems, was only a chance steamer acquaintance of Hays', thought the attack must have been meant for *her*, as she had recognised in the Italian a man who had stolen from her divorced husband in the States, two years ago, and was a fugitive from justice. At least that was the explanation given by Hays, for the woman had fainted and been driven off to her

hotel by the Quartermaster, and Tournelli had escaped. But the Editor was on his track. "You didn't notice that lady, Tom, did you?"

Tom came out of an abstracted study, and said, "No; she had her back to me all the time."

Manners regarded him steadily for a moment without speaking, but in a way that I could not help thinking was much more embarrassing to the bystanders than to him. When we rose to leave, as he placed his usual gratuity into Tom's hand, he said carelessly, "You might drop into my office to-morrow if you have anything to tell *me*."

"I haven't," said Tom quietly.

"Then I may have something to tell *you*."

Tom nodded, and turned away to his duties.

The Mining Secretary and myself could scarcely wait to reach the street before we turned eagerly on Manners.

"Well?"

"Well; the woman you saw was Tom's runaway wife, and Tournelli the man she ran away with."

"And Tom knew it?"

"Can't say."

"And you mean to say that all this while Tom never suspected *him*, and even did not recognise *her* just now?"

Manners lifted his hat and passed his fingers through his hair meditatively. "Ask me something easier, gentlemen."

A Treasure of the Galleon.

HER father's house was nearly a mile from the sea, but the breath of it was always strong at the windows and doors in the early morning, and when there were heavy "south-westers" blowing in the winter the wind brought the sharp sting of sand to her cheek, and the rain an odd taste of salt to her lips. On this particular December afternoon, however, as she stood in the doorway, it seemed to be singularly calm; the south-west trades blew but faintly, and scarcely broke the crests of the long Pacific swell that lazily rose and fell on the beach, which only a slanting copse of scrub-oak and willow hid from the cottage. Nevertheless, she knew this league-long strip of shining sand much better, it is to be feared, than the scanty flower-garden, arid and stunted by its contiguity. It had been her playground when she first came there, a motherless girl of twelve, and she had helped her father gather its scattered driftwood—as the fortunes of the Millers were not above accepting these occasional offerings of their lordly neighbour.

"I wouldn't go far to-day, Jenny," said her father, as the girl stepped from the threshold. "I don't trust the weather at this season; and besides, you had better be looking over your wardrobe for the Christmas Eve party at Sol. Catlin's."

"Why, father, you don't intend to go to that man's?" said the girl, looking up with a troubled face.

"Lawyer Miller," as he was called by his few neighbours, looked slightly embarrassed. "Why not?" he asked in a faintly irritated tone.

"Why not? Why, father, you know how vulgar and conceited he is—how everybody here truckles to him!"

"Very likely; he's a very superior man of his kind—a kind they understand here, too—a great trapper, hunter, and pioneer."

"But I don't believe in his trapping, hunting, and pioneering," said the girl petulantly. "I believe it's all as hollow and boisterous as himself. It's no more real, or what one thinks it should be, than he is. And he dares to patronise you—you, father, an educated man and a gentleman!"

"Say rather an unsuccessful lawyer, who was fool enough to believe that buying a ranch could make him a farmer," returned her father, but half jestingly. "I only wish I was as good at my trade as he is."

"But you never liked him—you always used to ignore him; you've changed, father——" She stopped suddenly, for her recollection of her father's quiet superiority and easy independence when he first came there was in such marked contrast to his late careless and weak concession to the rude life around them, that she felt a pang of vague degradation, which she feared her voice might betray.

"Very well! Do as you like," he replied, with affected carelessness; "only I thought, as we cannot afford to go elsewhere this Christmas, it might be well for us to take what we could find here."

"Take what we could find here!" It was so unlike him—he who had always been so strong in preserving their little domestic refinements in their rude surroundings, that their poverty had never seemed mean, nor their seclusion ignoble. She turned away to conceal her indignant colour. She could share the household work with a squaw and Chinaman, she could fetch wood and water. Catlin had patronisingly seen her doing it, but to dance to his vulgar piping—never!

She was not long in reaching the sands that now lay before her, warm, sweet-scented from short beach grass, stretching to a dim rocky promontory, and absolutely untrod by any foot but her own. It was this virginity of seclusion that had been charming to her girlhood; fenced in between the impenetrable hedge of scrub-oaks on the one side, and the lifting green walls of breakers tipped with *chevaux de frise* of white foam on the other, she had known a perfect security for her sports and fancies that had captivated her town-bred instincts and native fastidiousness. A few white-winged sea-birds, as proud, reserved, and maidenlike as herself, had been her only companions. And it was now the custodian of her secret—a secret as innocent and childlike as her previous youthful fancies—but still a secret known only to herself.

One day she had come upon the rotting ribs of a wreck on the beach. Its distance from the tide line, its position, and its deep imbedding of sand, showed that it was of ancient origin. An omnivorous reader of all that pertained to the history of California, Jenny had in fancy often sailed the seas in one of those mysterious treasure-ships that had skirted the coast in bygone days, and she at once settled in her mind that her discovery was none other than a cast-away Philippine galleon. Partly from her reserve, and partly from a suddenly conceived plan, she determined to keep its existence as unknown to her father, as careful inquiry on her part had found it was equally unknown to the neighbours. For this shy, imaginative young girl of eighteen had convinced herself that it might still contain a part of its old treasure. She would dig for it herself, without telling anybody. If she failed, no one would know it; if she were successful, she would surprise her father and perhaps retrieve their fortune by less vulgar means than their present toil. Thanks to the secluded

locality and the fact that she was known to spend her leisure moments in wandering there, she could work without suspicion. Secretly conveying a shovel and a few tools to the spot the next day, she set about her prodigious task. As the upper works were gone, and the galleon not large, in three weeks, working an hour or two each day, she had made a deep excavation in the stern. She had found many curious things—the flotsam and jetsam of previous storms—but as yet, it is perhaps needless to say, not the treasure.

To-day she was filled with the vague hope of making her discovery before Christmas Day. To have been able to take her father something on that day—if only a few old coins—the fruit of her own unsuspected labour and intuition—not the result of vulgar barter or menial wage—would have been complete happiness. It was perhaps a somewhat visionary expectation for an educated girl of eighteen, but I am writing of a young Californian girl, who had lived in the fierce glamour of treasure hunting, and in whose sensitive individuality some of its subtle poison had been instilled. Howbeit, to-day she found nothing. She was sadly hiding her pick and shovel, as was her custom, when she discovered the fresh track of an alien foot in the sand. Robinson Crusoe was not more astounded at the savage footprint than Jenny Miller at this damning proof of the invasion of her sacred territory. The footprints came from and returned to the copse of shrubs. Some one might have seen her at work!

But a singular change in the weather, overlooked in her excitement, here forced itself upon her. A light film over sea and sky, lifted only by fitful gusts of wind, seemed to have suddenly thickened until it became an opaque vault, narrowing in circumference as the wind increased. The promontory behind her disappeared, as if swallowed up, the distance before her seemed to contract; the ocean at

her side, the colour of dull pewter, vanished in a sheet of slanting rain, and by the time she reached the house, half running, half carried along by the quartering force of the wind, a full gale was blowing.

It blew all the evening, reaching a climax and fury at past midnight that was remembered for many years along that coast. In the midst of it they heard the booming of cannon, and then the voices of neighbours in the road. "There was," said the voices, "a big steamer ashore just afore the house." They dressed quickly and ran out.

Hugging the edge of the copse, to breathe and evade the fury of the wind, they struggled to the sands. At first, looking out to sea, the girl saw nothing but foam. But, following the direction of a neighbour's arm, for in that wild tumult man alone seemed speechless, she saw directly before her, so close upon her that she could have thrown a pebble on board, the high bows of a ship. Indeed, its very nearness gave her the feeling that it was already saved, and its occasional heavy roll to leeward, drunken, helpless, ludicrous, but never awful, brought a hysteric laugh to her lips. But when a livid blue light, lit in the swinging top, showed a number of black objects clinging to bulwarks and rigging, and the sea, with languid, heavy cruelty, pushing rather than beating them away, one by one, she knew that Death was there.

The neighbours, her father with the others, had been running hopelessly to and fro, or cowering in groups against the copse, when suddenly they uttered a cry—their first—of joyful welcome. And with that shout, the man she most despised and hated, Sol. Catlin, mounted on a "calico" mustang, as outrageous and bizarre as himself, dashed among them.

In another moment what had been fear, bewilderment, and hesitation was changed to courage, confidence, and action. The men pressed eagerly around him, and as

eagerly dispersed under his quick command. Galloping at his heels was a team with the whale-boat, brought from the river, miles away. He was here, there, and everywhere; catching the line thrown by the rocket from the ship, marshalling the men to haul it in, answering the hail from those on board above the tempest, pervading everything and everybody with the fury of the storm; loud, imperious, domineering, self-asserting, all-sufficient, and successful! And when the boat was launched, the last mighty impulse came from his shoulder. He rode at the helm into the first hanging wall of foam, erect and triumphant! Dazzled, bewildered, crying and laughing, she hated him more than ever.

The boat made three trips, bringing off, with the aid of the hawser, all but the sailors she had seen perish before her own eyes. The passengers—they were few—the captain and officers, found refuge in her father's house, and were loud in their praises of Sol. Catlin. But in that grateful chorus a single gloomy voice arose, the voice of a wealthy and troubled passenger. "I will give," he said, "five thousand dollars to the man who brings me a box of securities I left in my state-room." Every eye turned instinctively to Sol; he answered only those of Jenny's. "Say ten thousand, and if the dod-blasted hulk holds together two hours longer I'll do it, d—n me! You hear me! My name's Sol. Catlin, and when I say a thing, by G—d, I do it." Jenny's disgust here reached its climax. The hero of a night of undoubted energy and courage had blotted it out in a single moment of native vanity and vulgar avarice.

He was gone; not only two hours, but daylight had come and they were eagerly seeking him, when he returned among them, dripping and—empty-handed. He had reached the ship, he said, with another; found the box, and trusted himself alone with it to the sea. But in the surf he had to abandon it to save himself. It had

perhaps drifted ashore, and might be found ; for himself, he abandoned his claim to the reward. Had he looked abashed or mortified, Jenny felt that she might have relented, but the braggart was as all-satisfied, as confident and boastful as ever. Nevertheless, as his eye seemed to seek hers, she was constrained, in mere politeness, to add her own to her father's condolences. "I suppose," she hesitated, in passing him, "that this is a mere nothing to you after all that you did last night that was really great and unselfish."

"Were you never disappointed, miss?" he said, with exasperating abruptness.

A quick consciousness of her own thankless labour on the galleon, and a terrible idea that he might have some suspicion of, and perhaps the least suggestion that she might have been disappointed in him, brought a faint colour to her cheek. But she replied with dignity—

"I really couldn't say. But certainly," she added, with a new-found pertness, "you don't look it."

"Nor do you, miss," was his idiotic answer.

A few hours later, alarmed at what she had heard of the inroads of the sea, which had risen higher than ever known to the oldest settler, and perhaps mindful of yesterday's footprints, she sought her old secluded haunt. The wreck was still there, but the sea had reached it. The excavation between its gaunt ribs was filled with drift and the sea-weed carried there by the surges and entrapped in its meshes. And there too, caught as in a net, lay the wooden box of securities Sol. Catlin had abandoned to the sea.

This is the story as it was told to me. The singularity of coincidences has challenged some speculation. Jenny insisted at the time upon sharing the full reward with Catlin, but local critics have pointed out that from subsequent events this proved nothing. For she had married him !

Out of a Pioneer's Trunk.

IT was a slightly cynical, but fairly good-humoured crowd that had gathered before a warehouse on Long Wharf in San Francisco one afternoon in the summer of '51. Although the occasion was an auction, the bidders' chances more than usually hazardous, and the season and locality famous for reckless speculation, there was scarcely any excitement among the bystanders, and a lazy, half-humorous curiosity seemed to have taken the place of any zeal for gain.

It was an auction of unclaimed trunks and boxes—the personal luggage of early emigrants—which had been left on storage in hulk or warehouse at San Francisco, while the owner was seeking his fortune in the mines. The difficulty and expense of transport, often obliging the gold seeker to make part of his journey on foot, restricted him to the smallest *impedimenta*, and that of a kind not often found in the luggage of ordinary civilisation. As a consequence, during the emigration of '49, he was apt on landing to avail himself of the invitation usually displayed on some of the doors of the rude hostelries on the shore: "Rest for the Weary and Storage for Trunks." In a majority of cases he never returned to claim his stored property. Enforced absence, protracted equally by good or evil fortune, accumulated the high storage charges until they usually far exceeded the actual value of the goods; sickness, further emigration, or death also reduced the

number of possible claimants, and that more wonderful human frailty—absolute forgetfulness of deposited possessions—combined together to leave the bulk of the property in the custodian's hands. Under an understood agreement they were always sold at public auction after a given time. Although the contents of some of the trunks were exposed, it was found more in keeping with the public sentiment to sell the trunks *locked and unopened*. The element of curiosity was kept up from time to time by the incautious disclosures of the lucky or unlucky purchaser, and general bidding thus encouraged—except when the speculator, with the true gambling instinct, gave no indication in his face of what was drawn in this lottery. Generally, however, some suggestion in the exterior of the trunk, a label or initials; some conjectural knowledge of its former owner, or the idea that he might be secretly present in the hope of getting his property back for less than the accumulated dues, kept up the bidding and interest.

A modest-looking, well-worn portmanteau had been just put up at a small opening bid, when Harry Flint joined the crowd. The young man had arrived a week before at San Francisco friendless and penniless, and had been forced to part with his own effects to procure necessary food and lodging while looking for an employment. In the irony of fate that morning the proprietors of a dry-goods store, struck with his good looks and manners, had offered him a situation, if he could make himself more presentable to their fair clients. Harry Flint was gazing half abstractedly, half hopelessly, at the portmanteau, without noticing the auctioneer's persuasive challenge. In his abstraction he was not aware that the auctioneer's assistant was also looking at him curiously, and that possibly his dejected and half-clad appearance had ex-

cited the attention of one of the cynical bystanders, who was exchanging a few words with the assistant. He was, however, recalled to himself a moment later when the portmanteau was knocked down at fifteen dollars, and considerably startled when the assistant placed it at his feet with a grim smile. "That's your property, Fowler, and I reckon you look as if you wanted it back bad."

"But—there's some mistake," stammered Flint. "I didn't bid."

"No, but Tom Flynn did for you. You see, I spotted you from the first, and told Flynn I reckoned you were one of those chaps who came back from the mines dead broke. And he up and bought your things for you—like a square man. That's Flynn's style, if he is a gambler."

"But," persisted Flint, "this never was my property. My name isn't Fowler, and I never left anything here."

The assistant looked at him with a grim, half-credulous, half-scornful smile. "Have it your own way," he said, "but I oughter tell yer, old man, that I'm the warehouse clerk, and I remember *you*. I'm here for that purpose. But as that thar valise is bought and paid for by somebody else and given to you, it's nothing more to me. Take or leave it."

The ridiculousness of quarrelling over the mere form of his good fortune here struck Flint, and, as his abrupt benefactor had as abruptly disappeared, he hurried off with his prize. Reaching his cheap lodging-house, he examined its contents. As he had surmised, it contained a full suit of clothing of the better sort, and suitable to his urban needs. There were a few articles of jewellery, which he put religiously aside. There were some letters, which seemed to be of a purely business character. There were a few daguerreotypes of pretty faces, one of which was singularly fascinating to him. But there was another,

of a young man, which startled him with its marvellous resemblance *to himself*! In a flash of intelligence he understood it all now. It was the likeness of the former owner of the trunk, for whom the assistant had actually mistaken him! He glanced hurriedly at the envelopes of the letters. They were addressed to Shelby Fowler, the name by which the assistant had just called him. The mystery was plain now. And for the present he could fairly accept his good luck, and trust to later fortune to justify himself.

Transformed in his new garb, he left his lodgings to present himself once more to his possible employer. His way led past one of the large gambling saloons. It was yet too early to find the dry-goods trader disengaged; perhaps the consciousness of more decent, civilised garb emboldened him to mingle more freely with strangers, and he entered the saloon. He was scarcely abreast of one of the faro tables when a man suddenly leaped up with an oath and discharged a revolver full in his face. The shot missed. Before his unknown assailant could fire again the astonished Flint had closed with him, and instinctively clutched the weapon. A brief but violent struggle ensued. Flint felt his strength failing him, when suddenly a look of astonishment came into the furious eyes of his adversary, and the man's grasp mechanically relaxed. The half-freed pistol, thrown upwards by this movement, was accidentally discharged point blank into his temples, and he fell dead. No one in the crowd had stirred or interfered.

"You've done for Australian Pete this time, Mr. Fowler," said a voice at his elbow. He turned gaspingly, and recognised his strange benefactor, Flynn. "I call you all to witness, gentlemen," continued the gambler, turning dictatorially to the crowd, "that this man was

first attacked and was *unarmed*." He lifted Flint's limp and empty hands and then pointed to the dead man, who was still grasping the weapon. "Come!" He caught the half-paralysed arm of Flint and dragged him into the street.

"But," stammered the horrified Flint, as he was borne along, "what does it all mean? What made that man attack me?"

"I reckon it was a case of shooting on sight, Mr. Fowler; but he missed it by not waiting to see if you were armed. It wasn't the square thing, and you're all right with the crowd now, whatever he might have had agin' you."

"But," protested the unhappy Flint, "I never laid eyes on the man before, and my name isn't Fowler."

Flynn halted, and dragged him in a doorway. "Who the devil are you?" he asked roughly.

Briefly, passionately, almost hysterically, Flint told him his scant story. An odd expression came over the gambler's face.

"Look here," he said abruptly; "I have passed my word to the crowd yonder that you are a dead-broke miner called Fowler. I allowed that you might have had some row with that Sydney Dick, Australian Pete, in the mines. That satisfied them. If I go back now, and say it's a lie, that your name ain't Fowler, and you never knew who Pete was, they'll jest pass you over to the police to deal with you, and wash their hands of it altogether. You may prove to the police who you are, and how that d——d clerk mistook you, but it will give you trouble. And who is there here who knows who you really are?"

"No one," said Flint, with sudden hopelessness.

"And you say you're an orphan, and ain't got any relations livin' that you're beholden to?"

"No one."

"Then take my advice, and *be* Fowler, and stick to it! Be Fowler until Fowler turns up, and thanks you for it; for you've saved Fowler's life, as Pete would never have funk'd and lost his grit over Fowler as he did with you; and you've a right to his name."

He stopped, and the same odd superstitious look came into his dark eyes.

"Don't you see what all that means? Well, I'll tell you. You're in the biggest streak of luck a man ever had. You've got the cards in your own hands! They spell 'Fowler'! Play Fowler first, last, and all the time. Good-night, and good luck, *Mr. Fowler.*"

The next morning's journal contained an account of the justifiable killing of the notorious desperado and ex-convict, Australian Pete, by a courageous young miner by the name of Fowler. "An act of firmness and daring," said the *Pioneer*, "which will go far to counteract the terrorism produced by those lawless ruffians."

In his new suit of clothes, and with this paper in his hand, Flint sought the dry-goods proprietor—the latter was satisfied and convinced. That morning Harry Flint began his career as salesman and as "Shelby Fowler."

From that day Shelby Fowler's career was one of uninterrupted prosperity. Within the year he became a partner. The same miraculous fortune followed other ventures later. He was mill owner, mine owner, bank director—a millionaire! He was popular, the reputation of his brief achievement over the desperado kept him secure from the attack of envy and rivalry. He never was confronted by the real Fowler. There was no danger of exposure by others—the one custodian of his secret, Tom Flynn, died in Nevada the year following. He had quite forgotten his

youthful past, and even the more recent lucky portmanteau ; remembered nothing, perhaps, but the pretty face of the daguerreotype that had fascinated him. There seemed to be no reason why he should not live and die as Shelby Fowler.

His business a year later took him to Europe. He was entering a train at one of the great railway stations of London, when the porter, who had just deposited his portmanteau in a compartment, reappeared at the window followed by a young lady in mourning.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I handed you the wrong portmanteau. That belongs to this young lady. This is yours."

Flint glanced at the portmanteau on the seat before him. It certainly was not his, although it bore the initials "S. F." He was mechanically handing it back to the porter, when his eyes fell on the young lady's face. For an instant he stood petrified. It was the face of the daguerreotype. "I beg pardon," he stammered, "but are these your initials?" She hesitated ; perhaps it was the abruptness of the question, but he saw she looked confused.

"No. A friend's."

She disappeared into another carriage, but from that moment Harry Flint knew that he had no other aim in life but to follow this clue and the beautiful girl who had dropped it. He bribed the guard at the next station, and discovered that she was going to York. On their arrival, he was ready on the platform to respectfully assist her. A few words disclosed the fact that she was a fellow-countrywoman, although residing in England, and at present on her way to join some friends at Harrogate. Her name was West. At the mention of his, he again fancied she looked disturbed.

They met again and again ; the informality of his introduction was overlooked by her friends, as his assumed name was already respectably and responsibly known be-

yond California. He thought no more of his future. He was in love. He even dared to think it might be returned ; but he felt he had no right to seek that knowledge until he had told her his real name and how he came to assume another's. He did so alone—scarcely a month after their first meeting. To his alarm, she burst into a flood of tears, and showed an agitation that seemed far beyond any apparent cause. When she had partly recovered, she said, in a low frightened voice—

“You are bearing *my brother's* name. But it was a name that the unhappy boy had so shamefully disgraced in Australia that he abandoned it, and, as he lay upon his death-bed, the last act of his wasted life was to write an imploring letter begging me to change mine too. For the infamous companion of his crime who had first tempted, then betrayed him, had possession of all his papers and letters, many of them from *me*, and was threatening to bring them to our Virginia home and expose him to our neighbours. Maddened by desperation, the miserable boy twice attempted the life of the scoundrel, and might have added that blood-guiltiness to his other sins had he lived. I *did* change my name to my mother's maiden one, left the country, and have lived here to escape the revelations of that desperado, should he fulfil his threat.”

In a flash of recollection Flint remembered the startled look that had come into his assailant's eye after they had clinched. It was the same man who had too late realised that his antagonist was not Fowler. “Thank God ! you are for ever safe from any exposure from that man,” he said gravely, “and the name of Fowler has never been known in San Francisco save in all respect and honour. It is for you to take back—fearlessly and alone !”

She did—but not alone, for she shared it with her husband.

The Ghosts of Stukeley Castle.

THERE should have been snow on the ground to make the picture seasonable and complete, but the Western Barbarian had lived long enough in England to know that, except in the pages of a holiday supplement, this was rarely the accompaniment of a Christmas landscape, and he cheerfully accepted, on the 24th of December, the background of a low, brooding sky, on which the delicate tracery of leafless sprays and blacker *chevaux de frise* of pine was faintly etched as a consistent setting to the turrets and peacefully stacked chimneys of Stukeley Castle. Yet, even in this disastrous eclipse of colour and distance, the harmonious outlines of the long, grey, irregular pile seemed to him as wonderful as ever. It still dominated the whole landscape, and, as he had often fancied, carried this subjection even to the human beings who had created it, lived in it, but which it seemed to have in some dull, senile way dozed over and forgotten. He vividly recalled the previous sunshine of an autumnal house party within its walls, where some descendants of its old castellans, encountered in long galleries or at the very door of their bedrooms, looked as alien to the house as the Barbarian himself.

For the rest, it may be found described in the local guide-books, with a view of its "South Front," "West Front," and "Great Quadrangle." It was alleged to be based on an encampment of the Romans—that highly apocryphal race who seemed to have spent their time in getting up

picnics on tessellated pavements, where, after hilariously emptying their pockets of their loose coin and throwing round their dishes, they instantly built a road to escape by, leaving no other record of their existence. Stowe and Dugdale had recorded the date when a Norman favourite obtained the royal licence to “embattle it;” it had done duty on Christmas cards, with the questionable snow already referred to laid on thickly in crystal; it had been lovingly pourtrayed by a fair countrywoman—the vivacious correspondent of the *East Machias Sentinel*—in a combination of the most delightful feminine disregard of facts with the highest feminine respect for titles. It was rich in a real and spiritual estate of tapestries, paintings, armour, legends, and ghosts. Everything the poet could wish for, and indeed some things that decent prose might have possibly wished out of it, were there.

Yet, from the day that it had been forcibly seized by a Parliamentary General, until more recently, when it had passed by the no less desperate conveyance of marriage into the hands of a Friendly Nobleman known to the Western Barbarian, it had been supposed to suggest something or other more remarkable than itself. “Few spectators,” said the guide-book, “even the most unimpassioned, can stand in the courtyard and gaze upon those historic walls without feeling a thrill of awe,” &c. The Western Barbarian had stood there, gazed, and felt no thrill. “The privileged guest,” said the grave historian, “passing in review the lineaments of the illustrious owners of Stukeley, as he slowly paces the sombre gallery, must be conscious of emotions of no ordinary character,” &c., &c. The Barbarian had been conscious of no such emotions. And it was for this reason, and believing he *might* experience them if left there in solitude, with no distracting or extraneous humanity around him, it had been agreed between him and the

Friendly Nobleman, who had fine Barbarian instincts, that as he—the Friendly Nobleman—and his family were to spend their holidays abroad, the Barbarian should be allowed, on the eve and day of Christmas, to stay at Stukeley alone. “But,” added his host, “you’ll find it beastly lonely, and although I’ve told the housekeeper to look after you—you’d better go over to dine at Audley Friars, where there’s a big party, and they know you, and it will be a deuced deal more amusing. And—er—I say—you know—you’re really *not* looking out for ghosts, and that sort of thing, are you? You know you fellows don’t believe in them—over there.” And the Barbarian, assuring him that this was a part of his deficient emotions, it was settled then and there that he should come. And that was why, on the 24th of December, the Barbarian found himself gazing hopefully on the landscape with his portmanteau at his feet, as he drove up the avenue.

The ravens did *not* croak ominously from the battlements as he entered. And the housekeeper, although neither “stately” nor “tall,” nor full of reminiscences of “his late lordship, the present Earl’s father,” was very sensible and practical. The Barbarian could, of course, have his choice of rooms—but—she had thought—remembering his tastes the last time, that the long blue room? Exactly! The long, low-arched room, with the faded blue tapestry, looking upon the gallery—capital! He had always liked that room. From purely negative evidence he had every reason to believe that it was the one formidable-looking room in England that Queen Elizabeth had *not* slept in.

When the footman had laid out his clothes, and his step grew fainter along the passage, until it was suddenly swallowed up with the closing of a red baize door in the turret staircase, like a trap in an *oubliette*, the whole building seemed to sink back into repose. Quiet it certainly

was, but not more so, he remembered, than when the chambers on either side were filled with guests, and floating voices in the corridor were lost in those all-absorbing walls. So far, certainly, this was no new experience. It was past four. He waited for the shadows to gather. Light thickened beyond his windows; gradually the outflanking wall and part of a projecting terrace crumbled away in the darkness, as if night were slowly reducing the castle. The figures on the tapestry in his room stood out faintly. The gallery seen through his open door, barred with black spaces between the mullioned windows, presently became obliterated, as if invaded by a dull smoke from without. But nothing moved, nothing glimmered. Really this might become in time very stupid.

He was startled, however, while dressing, to see from his windows that the great banqueting-hall was illuminated, but on coming down was amused to find his dinner served on a small table in its oaken solitude lit by the large electric chandelier—for Stukeley Castle under its present lord had all the modern improvements—shining on the tattered banners and glancing mail above him. It was evidently the housekeeper's reading of some written suggestion of her noble master. The Barbarian, in a flash of instinct, imagined the passage—

“Humour him as a harmless lunatic; the plate is quite safe.”

Declining the further offer of an illumination of the picture-gallery, grand drawing-room, ball-room, and chapel, a few hours later he found himself wandering in the corridor with a single candle and a growing conviction of the hopelessness of his experiment. The castle had as yet yielded to him nothing that he had not seen before in the distraction of company and the garishness of day. It was becoming a trifle monotonous. Yet fine

—exceedingly ; and now that a change of wind had lifted the fog, and the full moon shone on the lower half of the pictures of the gallery, starting into the most artificial simulation of life a number of Van Dyck legs, farthing-gales, and fingers that would have deceived nobody, it seemed gracious, gentle, and innocent beyond expression. Wandering down the gallery, conscious of being more like a ghost than any of the painted figures, and that they might reasonably object to him, he wished he could meet the original of one of those pictured gallants and secretly compare his fingers with the copy. He remembered an embroidered pair of gloves in a cabinet and a suit of armour on the wall that, in measurement, did not seem to bear out the delicacy of the one nor the majesty of the other. It occurred to him also to satisfy a yearning he had once felt to try on a certain breastplate and steel cap that hung over an oaken settle. It will be perceived that he was getting a good deal bored. For thus caparisoned he listlessly, and, as will be seen, imprudently, allowed himself to sink back into a very modern chair, and give way to a dreamy cogitation.

What possible interest could the dead have in anything that was here? Admitting that they had any, and that it was not the *living*, whom the Barbarian had always found most inclined to haunt the past, would not a ghost of any decided convictions object to such a collection as his descendant had gathered in this gallery? Yonder idiot in silk and steel had blunderingly and cruelly persecuted his kinsman in leather and steel only a few panels distant. Would they care to meet here? And if their human weaknesses had died with them, what would bring them here at all? And if not *them*—who then? He stopped short. The door at the lower end of the gallery had opened! Not stealthily, not noiselessly, but in an

ordinary fashion, and a number of figures, dressed in the habiliments of a bygone age, came trooping in. They did not glide in nor float in, but trampled in awkwardly, clumsily, and unfamiliarly, gaping about them as they walked. At the head was apparently a steward in a kind of livery, who stopped once or twice and seemed to be pointing out and explaining certain objects in the room. A flash of indignant intelligence filled the brain of the Barbarian! It seemed absurd!—impossible!—but it was true! It was a holiday excursion party of ghosts being shown over Stukeley Castle by a ghostly cicerone! And as his measured, monotonous voice rose on the Christmas morning air, it could be heard that he was actually showing off, not the antiquities of the Castle, but the *modern improvements!*

“This ’ere, gossips”—the Barbarian instantly detected the fallacy of all the so-called mediæval jargon he had read—“is the Helectric Bell, which does away with our h’old, h’ordinary ’orn blowin’, and the h’attendant waitin’ in the ’all for the usual, ‘Without there, who waits?’ which all of us was accustomed to in mortal flesh. You h’observe this button. I press it so, and it instantly rings a bell in the kitchen ’all, and shows in fair letters the name of this ’ere gallery—as we will see later. Will h’any good dame or gaffer press the button? Will *you*, Mistress?” said the Cicerone to a giggling, kerchief-coifed lass.

“Oi soy, Maudlin!—look out, will yer!—It’s the soime old gag as them bloomin’ knobs you ketched hold of when yer was ’ere las’ Whitsuntide,” called out the mediæval ’Arry of the party.

“It is *not* the Galvanic-Magnetic machine in ’is Lordship’s library,” said the Cicerone severely, “which is a mere toy for infants, and h’old fashioned. And we have ’ere a much later invention. I open this little door, I

turn this 'andle—called a switch—and, h'as you perceive, the gallery is h'instantly h'illuminated."

There was a hoarse cry of astonishment from the assemblage. The Barbarian felt an awful thrill as this searching insufferable light of the nineteenth century streamed suddenly upon the up-turned, vacant-eyed, and dull faces of those sightseers of the past. But there was no responsive gleam in their eyes.

"It be the sun," gasped an old woman in a grey cloak.

"Toime to rouse out, Myryan, and make the foire," said the mediæval 'Arry. The custodian smiled with superior toleration.

"But what do 'ee want o' my old lanthorn," asked a yellow-jerkined stable boy, pointing to an old-fashioned horned lantern, *tempus* Edward III, "with this brave loight?"

"You know," said the custodian, with condescending familiarity, "these mortals worship what they call 'curios' and the 'antique,' and 'is Lordship gave a matter of fifty pounds for that same lanthorn. That's what the modern folk come 'ere to see—like as ye."

"Oi've an old three-legged stool in Whitechapel Oi'll let his Lordship 'ave cheap—for five quid," suggested the humourist.

"The 'prentice wight knows not that he speaks truly. For 'ere is a braver jest than 'is. Good folks, wilt please ye to examine yon coffer?" pointing to an oaken chest.

"'Tis but poor stuff, marry," said Maudlin.

"'Tis a coffer—the same being made in Wardour Street last year—'is Lordship gave one hundred pounds for it. Look at these would-be worm-holes—but they were made with an *auger*. Marry, *we* know what worm-holes are!"

A ghastly grin spread over the faces of the spectral

assembly as they gathered around the chest with silent laughter.

"Wilt walk 'ere and see the phonograph in the libry, made by Hedison, an Hamerican, which bottles up the voice and preserves it fresh for a hundred years? 'Tis a rare new fancy."

"Rot," said 'Arry. Then turning to the giggling Maudlin, he whispered, "Saw it las' toime. 'Is Lordship got a piece o' moy moind that Oi reeled off into it about this 'ere swindle. Fawncy that old bloke there charging a tanner a piece to us for chaffin' a bit of a barrel."

"Have you no last new braveries to show us of the gallants and their mistresses, as you were wont?" said Maudlin to the Cicerone. "'Twas a rare show last time—the modish silk gowns and farthingales in the closets."

"But there be no company this Christmas," said the custodian, "and 'is Lordship does not entertain, unless it be the new Fool 'is Lordship sent down 'ere to-day, who has been mopin' and moonin' in the corridors, as is ever the way of these wittol creatures when they are not heeded. He was 'ere in a rare motley of his own choosing, with which he thinks to raise a laugh, a moment ago. Ye see him not—not 'avin' the gift that belongs by right to my dread office. 'Tis a weird privilege I have—and may not be imparted to others—save——"

"Save what, good man steward? Prithee, speak?" said Marian earnestly.

"'Tis ever a shillin' extra."

There was no response. A few of the more bashful ghosts thrust their hands in their pockets and looked awkwardly another way. The Barbarian felt a momentary relief, followed by a slight pang of mortified vanity. He was a little afraid of them. The price was an extortion, certainly, but surely he was worth the extra shilling!

"He has brought but little braveries of attire into the Castle," continued the Cicerone, "but I 'ave something 'ere which was found on the top of his portmanteau. I wot ye know not the use of this." To the Barbarian's intense indignation, the Cicerone produced, from under his, his (the Barbarian's) own opera hat. "Marry, what should be this? Rede me this riddle! To it—and unyoke!"

A dozen vacant guesses were made as the showman held it aloft. Then with a conjurer's gesture he suddenly placed his thumbs within the rim, released the spring, and extended the hat. The assembly laughed again silently as before.

"'Tis a hat," said the Cicerone, with a superior air.

"Nay," said Maudlin, "give it here." She took it curiously, examined it, and then with a sudden coquettish movement lifted it towards her own coifed head, as if to try it on. The Cicerone suddenly sprang forward with a despairing gesture to prevent her. And here the Barbarian was conscious of a more startling revelation. How and why he could not tell, but he *knew* that the putting on of that article of his own dress would affect the young girl as the assumption of the steel cap and corselet had evidently affected him, and that he would instantly become as visible to her as she and her companions had been to him. He attempted to rise, but was too late; she had evaded the Cicerone by ducking, and, facing in the direction of the Barbarian, clapped the hat on her head. He saw the swift light of consciousness, of astonishment, of sudden fear spring into her eyes! She shrieked; he started, struggled, and awoke!

But what was this! He was alone in the moonlit gallery, certainly; the ghastly figures in their outlandish garb were gone; he was awake and in his senses, but, in this first flash of real consciousness, he could have sworn that some-

thing remained ! Something terror-stricken, and retreating even then before him—something of the world, modern—and even as he gazed, vanishing through the gallery door with the material flash and rustle of silk.

He walked quietly to the door. It was open. Ah ! No doubt he had forgotten to shut it fast ; a current of air or a sudden draught had opened it. That noise had awakened him. More than that, remembering the lightning flash of dream consciousness, it had been the *cause* of his dream. Yet for a few moments he listened attentively.

What might have been the dull reverberation of a closing door in the direction of the housekeeper's room, on the lower story, was all he heard. He smiled, for even that, natural as it might be, was less distinct and real than his absurd vision.

Nevertheless the next afternoon he concluded to walk over to Audley Friars for his Christmas dinner. Its hospitable master greeted him cordially.

“But do you know, my dear fellow,” he said, when they were alone for a moment, “if you hadn't come by yourself I'd have sent over there for you. The fact is that A—— wrote to us that you were down at Stukeley alone, ghost-hunting or something of that sort, and I'm afraid it leaked out among the young people of our party. Two of our girls—I shan't tell you which—stole over there last night to give you a start of some kind. They didn't see you at all, but, by Jove, it seems they got the biggest kind of a fright *themselves*, for they declare that something dreadful in armour, you know, was sitting in the gallery. Awfully good joke, wasn't it? Of course *you* didn't see anything—did you?”

“No,” said the Barbarian discreetly.

The Great Deadwood Mystery.

PART I.

It was growing quite dark in the telegraph office at Cottonwood, Tuolumne Co., California. The office, a box-like enclosure, was separated from the public room of the Miners' Hotel by a thin partition, and the operator, who was also news and express agent at Cottonwood, had closed his window, and was lounging by his news-stand preparatory to going home. Accustomed as he was to long intervals of idleness, he was fast becoming bored.

The tread of mud-muffled boots on the verandah, and the entrance of two men, offered a momentary excitement. He recognised in the strangers two prominent citizens of Cottonwood, and their manner bespoke business. One of them proceeded to the desk, wrote a despatch, and handed it to the other interrogatively.

"That's about the way the thing p'int's," responded his companion.

"I reckoned it only squar to use his dientikal words?"

"That's so."

The first speaker turned to the operator with the despatch.

"How soon can you shove her through?"

The operator glanced professionally over the address and the length of the despatch.

"Now," he answered promptly.

"And she gets there——?"

"To-night; but there's no delivery until to-morrow."

"Shove her through to-night, and say there's an extra twenty left here for delivery"

The operator, accustomed to all kinds of extravagant outlay for expedition, replied that he would lay this proposition, with the despatch, before the San Francisco office. He then took it and read it—and re-read it. He preserved the usual professional apathy—had doubtless sent many more enigmatical and mysterious messages—but, nevertheless, when he finished he raised his eyes inquiringly to his customer. That gentleman, who enjoyed a reputation for equal spontaneity of temper and revolver, met his gaze a little impatiently. The operator had recourse to a trick. Under the pretence of misunderstanding the message, he obliged the sender to repeat it aloud for the sake of accuracy, and even suggested a few verbal alterations, ostensibly to insure correctness, but really to extract further information. Nevertheless, the man doggedly persisted in a literal transcript of his message. The operator went to his instrument hesitatingly.

"I suppose," he added half questioningly, "there ain't no chance of a mistake? This address is Rightbody, that rich old Bostonian that everybody knows. There ain't but one?"

"That's the address," responded the first speaker coolly.

"Didn't know the old chap had investments out here," suggested the operator, lingering at his instrument.

"No more did I," was the insufficient reply.

For some few moments nothing was heard but the click of the instrument, as the operator worked the key with the usual appearance of imparting confidence to a somewhat reluctant hearer who preferred to talk himself. The two

men stood by, watching his motions with the usual awe of the unprofessional. When he had finished, they laid before him two gold pieces. As the operator took them up, he could not help saying—

“The old man went off kinder sudden, didn’t he? Had no time to write?”

“Not sudden for that kind o’ man,” was the exasperating reply.

But the speaker was not to be disconcerted. “If there is an answer——”

“There ain’t any,” replied the first speaker quietly.

“Why?”

“Because the man ez sent the message is dead.”

“But it’s signed by you two.”

“On’y ez witnesses—eh?” appealed the first speaker to his comrade.

“On’y ez witnesses,” responded the other.

The operator shrugged his shoulders. The business concluded, the first speaker slightly relaxed. He nodded to the operator, and turned to the bar-room with a pleasing social impulse. When their glasses were set down empty, the first speaker, with a cheerful condemnation of the hard times and the weather, apparently dismissed all previous proceedings from his mind, and lounged out with his companion. At the corner of the street they stopped.

“Well, that job’s done,” said the first speaker, by way of relieving the slight social embarrassment of parting.

“That’s so,” responded his companion, and shook his hand.

They parted. A gust of wind swept through the pines, and struck a faint *Æolian* cry from the wires above their heads, and the rain and the darkness again slowly settled upon Cottonwood.

The message lagged a little at San Francisco, laid over

half-an-hour at Chicago, and fought longitude the whole way, so that it was past midnight when the "all night" operator took it from the wires at Boston. But it was freighted with a mandate from the San Francisco office, and a messenger was procured, who sped with it through dark snow-bound streets, between the high walls of close-shuttered rayless houses to a certain formal square, ghostly with snow-covered statues. Here he ascended the broad steps of a reserved and solid-looking mansion, and pulled a bronze bell knob that, somewhere within those chaste recesses, after an apparent reflective pause, coldly communicated the fact that a stranger was waiting without—as he ought. Despite the lateness of the hour, there was a slight glow from the windows, clearly not enough to warm the messenger with indications of a festivity within, but yet bespeaking, as it were, some prolonged though subdued excitement. The sober servant, who took the despatch and receipted for it as gravely as if witnessing a last will and testament, respectfully paused before the entrance of the drawing-room. The sound of measured and rhetorical speech, through which the occasional catarrhal cough of the New England coast struggled, as the only effort of nature not wholly repressed, came from its heavily-curtained recesses, for the occasion of the evening had been the reception and entertainment of various distinguished persons, and, as had been epigrammatically expressed by one of the guests, "the history of the country" was taking its leave in phrases more or less memorable and characteristic. Some of these valedictory axioms were clever, some witty, a few profound, but always left as a genteel contribution to the entertainer. Some had been already prepared, and, like a card, had served and identified the guest at other mansions.

The last guest departed, the last carriage rolled away,

when the servant ventured to indicate the existence of the despatch to his master, who was standing on the hearthrug in an attitude of wearied self-righteousness. He took it, opened it, read it, re-read it, and said—

“There must be some mistake ! It is not for me ; call the boy, Waters.”

Waters, who was perfectly aware that the boy had left, nevertheless obediently walked towards the hall door, but was recalled by his master.

“No matter—at present !”

“It’s nothing serious, William ?” asked Mrs. Rightbody, with languid wifely concern.

“No, nothing. Is there a light in my study ?”

“Yes. But before you go—can you give me a moment or two ?”

Mr. Rightbody turned a little impatiently towards his wife. She had thrown herself languidly on the sofa, her hair was slightly disarranged, and part of a slippered foot was visible. She might have been a finely-formed woman, but even her careless *deshabille* left the general impression that she was severely flannelled throughout, and that any ostentation of womanly charm was under vigorous sanitary surveillance.

“Mrs. Marvin told me to-night that her son made no secret of his serious attachment for our Alice, and that if I was satisfied, Mr. Marvin would be glad to confer with you at once.”

The information did not seem to absorb Mr. Rightbody’s wandering attention, but rather increased his impatience. He said hastily that he would speak of that to-morrow ; and, partly by way of reprisal, and partly to dismiss the subject, added—

“Positively James must pay some attention to the register and thermometer. It was over 70° to-night, and the ventilating draught was closed in the drawing-room.”

"That was because Professor Ammon sat near it, and the old gentleman's tonsils are so sensitive."

"He ought to know from Dr. Dyer Doit that systematic and regular exposure to draughts stimulates the mucous membrane, while fixed air over 60° invariably——"

"I am afraid, William," interrupted Mrs. Rightbody, with feminine adroitness, adopting her husband's topic with a view of thereby directing him from it, "I'm afraid that people do not yet appreciate the substitution of *bouillon* for punch and ices. I observed that Mr. Spondee declined it, and I fancied looked disappointed. The fibrine and wheat in liqueur-glasses passed quite unnoticed too."

"And yet each half-drachm contained the half-digested substance of a pound of beef. I'm surprised at Spondee," continued Mr. Rightbody aggrievedly. "Exhausting his brain and nerve force by the highest creative efforts of the Muse, he prefers perfumed and diluted alchohol flavoured with carbonic acid gas. Even Mrs. Faringway admitted to me that the sudden lowering of the temperature of the stomach by the introduction of ice——"

"Yes, but she took a lemon ice at the last Dorothea Reception, and asked me if I had observed that the lower animals refused their food at a temperature over 60°."

Mr. Rightbody again moved impatiently towards the door. Mrs. Rightbody eyed him curiously.

"You will not write, I hope? Dr. Kepler told me to-night that your cerebral symptoms interdicted any prolonged mental strain."

"I must consult a few papers," responded Mr. Rightbody curtly, as he entered his library.

It was a richly furnished apartment, morbidly severe in its decorations, which were symptomatic of a gloomy dyspepsia of art, then quite prevalent. A few curios, very ugly, but providentially equally rare, were scattered about; there were

various bronzes, marbles, and casts, all requiring explanation, and so fulfilling their purpose of promoting conversation and exhibiting the erudition of their owner. There were souvenirs of travel with a history, old *bric-a-brac* with a pedigree, but little or nothing that challenged attention for itself alone. In all cases the superiority of the owner to his possessions was admitted. As a natural result, nobody ever lingered there, the servants avoided the room, and no child was ever known to play in it.

Mr. Rightbody turned up the gas, and from a cabinet of drawers, precisely labelled, drew a package of letters. These he carefully examined. All were discoloured, and made dignified by age; but some, in their original freshness, must have appeared trifling and inconsistent with any correspondent of Mr. Rightbody. Nevertheless, that gentleman spent some moments in carefully perusing them, occasionally referring to the telegram in his hand. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Mr. Rightbody started, made a half-unconscious movement to return the letters to the drawer, turned the telegram face downwards, and then somewhat harshly stammered—

“Eh? Who’s there? Come in!”

“I beg your pardon, papa,” said a very pretty girl, entering, without, however, the slightest trace of apology or awe in her manner, and taking a chair with the self-possession and familiarity of an *habitué* of the room; “but I knew it was not your habit to write late, so I supposed you were not busy. I am on my way to bed.”

She was so very pretty, and withal so utterly unconscious of it, or perhaps so consciously superior to it, that one was provoked into a more critical examination of her face. But this only resulted in a reiteration of her beauty, and, perhaps, the added facts that her dark eyes were very

womanly, her rich complexion eloquent, and her chiselled lips full enough to be passionate or capricious, notwithstanding that their general effect suggested neither caprice, womanly weakness, nor passion.

With the instinct of an embarrassed man, Mr. Rightbody touched the topic he would have preferred to avoid.

"I suppose we must talk over to-morrow," he hesitated, "this matter of yours and Mr. Marvin's? Mrs. Marvin has formally spoken to your mother."

Miss Alice lifted her bright eyes intelligently, but not joyfully, and the colour of action rather than embarrassment rose to her round cheeks.

"Yes, *he* said she would," she answered simply.

"At present," continued Mr. Rightbody, still awkwardly, "I see no objection to the proposed arrangement."

Miss Alice opened her round eyes at this. "Why, papa, I thought it had been all settled long ago. Mamma knew it, you knew it. Last July mamma and you talked it over."

"Yes, yes," returned her father, fumbling his papers; "that is—well, we will talk of it to-morrow." In fact, Mr. Rightbody *had* intended to give the affair a proper attitude of seriousness and solemnity by due precision of speech and some apposite reflections when he should impart the news to his daughter, but felt himself unable to do it now. "I am glad, Alice," he said at last, "that you have quite forgotten your previous whims and fancies. You see *we* are right."

"Oh, I dare say, papa, if I'm to be married at all, that Mr. Marvin is in every way suitable."

Mr. Rightbody looked at his daughter narrowly. There was not the slightest impatience nor bitterness in her manner; it was as well regulated as the sentiment she expressed.

"Mr. Marvin is——" he began.

"I know what Mr. Marvin *is*," interrupted Miss Alice, "and he has promised me that I shall be allowed to go on with my studies the same as before. I shall graduate with my class, and if I prefer to practise my profession, I can do so in two years after our marriage."

"In two years?" queried Mr. Rightbody curiously.

"Yes. You see, in case we should have a child, that would give me time enough to wean it."

Mr. Rightbody looked at this flesh of his flesh, pretty and palpable flesh as it was; but being confronted as equally with the brain of his brain, all he could do was to say meekly—

"Yes, certainly. We will see about all that to-morrow."

Miss Alice rose. Something in the free, unfettered swing of her arms, as she rested them, lightly, after a half yawn, on her lithe hips, suggested his next speech, although still *distract* and impatient.

"You continue your exercise with the Health Lift yet, I see."

"Yes, papa, but I had to give up the flannels. I don't see how mamma could wear them. But my dresses are high-necked, and by bathing I toughen my skin. See," she added, as with a childlike unconsciousness she unfastened two or three buttons of her gown, and exposed the white surface of her throat and neck to her father; "I can defy a chill."

Mr. Rightbody, with something akin to a genuine playful, paternal laugh, leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

"It's getting late, Ally," he said parentally, but not dictatorially. "Go to bed."

"I took a nap of three hours this afternoon," said Miss Alice, with a dazzling smile, "to anticipate this dissipation. Good-night, papa. To-morrow, then."

"To-morrow," repeated Mr. Rightbody, with his eyes still fixed upon the girl vaguely. "Good-night."

Miss Alice tripped from the room, possibly a trifle the more light-heartedly that she had parted from her father in one of his rare moments of illogical human weakness. And perhaps it was well for the poor girl that she kept this single remembrance of him, when, I fear, in after years, his methods, his reasoning, and indeed all he had tried to impress upon her childhood, had faded from her memory.

For, when she had left, Mr. Rightbody fell again to the examination of his old letters. This was quite absorbing; so much so that he did not notice the footsteps of Mrs. Rightbody on the staircase as she passed to her chamber, nor that she had paused on the landing to look through the glass half-door on her husband, as he sat there with the letters beside him and the telegram opened before him. Had she waited a moment later, she would have seen him rise and walk to the sofa with a disturbed air and a slight confusion, so that on reaching it he seemed to hesitate to lie down, although pale and evidently faint. Had she still waited, she would have seen him rise again with an agonised effort, stagger to the table, fumblingly refold and replace the papers in the cabinet, and lock it; and although now but half-conscious, hold the telegram over the gas-flame till it was consumed. For had she waited until this moment, she would have flown unhesitatingly to his aid, as, this act completed, he staggered again, reached his hand toward the bell, but vainly, and then fell prone upon the sofa.

But alas, no providential nor accidental hand was raised to save him, or anticipate the progress of this story. And when, half-an-hour later, Mrs. Rightbody, a little alarmed and more indignant at his violation of the doctor's rules,

appeared upon the threshold, Mr. Rightbody lay upon the sofa, dead !

With bustle, with thronging feet, with the irruption of strangers, and a hurrying to and fro, but, more than all, with an impulse and emotion unknown to the mansion when its owner was in life, Mrs. Rightbody strove to call back the vanished life ; but in vain. The highest medical intelligence, called from its bed at this strange hour, saw only the demonstration of its theories, made a year before. Mr. Rightbody was dead—without doubt—without mystery—even as a correct man should die ; logically, and endorsed by the highest medical authority.

But even in the confusion Mrs. Rightbody managed to speed a messenger to the telegraph office for a copy of the despatch received by Mr. Rightbody, but now missing.

In the solitude of her own room, and without a confidant, she read these words—

“COPY.

“*To Mr. Adams Rightbody, Boston, Mass.*

“Joshua Silsbee died suddenly this morning. His last request was that you should remember your sacred compact with him of thirty years ago.

(Signed)

“SEVENTY-FOUR.

“SEVENTY-FIVE.”

In the darkened home, and amid the formal condolences of their friends, who had called to gaze upon the scarcely cold features of their late associate, Mrs. Rightbody managed to send another despatch. It was addressed to “Seventy-Four and Seventy-Five,” Cottonwood. In a few hours she received the following enigmatical response :—

“A horse thief, named Josh Silsbee, was lynched yesterday morning by the Vigilantes at Deadwood.”

PART II.

THE spring of 1874 was retarded in the Californian Sierras. So much so, that certain Eastern tourists who had early ventured into the Yo Semite Valley, found themselves, one May morning, snow-bound against the tempestuous shoulders of *El Capitan*. So furious was the onset of the wind at the Upper Merced Cañon, that even so respectable a lady as Mrs. Rightbody was fain to cling to the neck of her guide to keep her seat in the saddle; while Miss Alice, scorning all masculine assistance, was hurled, a lovely chaos, against the snowy wall of the chasm. Mrs. Rightbody screamed; Miss Alice raged under her breath, but scrambled to her feet again in silence.

"I told you so," said Mrs. Rightbody, in an indignant whisper, as her daughter again ranged beside her—"I warned you especially, Alice—that—that—"

"What?" interrupted Miss Alice curtly.

"That you would need your chemiloons and high boots," said Mrs. Rightbody, in a regretful undertone, slightly increasing her distance from the guides.

Miss Alice shrugged her pretty shoulders scornfully, but ignored her mother's implication.

"You were particularly warned against going into the Valley at this season," she only replied grimly.

Mrs. Rightbody raised her eyes impatiently.

"You know how anxious I was to discover your poor father's strange correspondent, Alice; you have no consideration."

"But when you *have* discovered him—what then?" queried Miss Alice.

"What then?"

"Yes. My belief is that you will find the telegram

only a mere business cypher. And all this quest mere nonsense."

"Alice! why, *you* yourself thought your father's conduct that night very strange. Have you forgotten?"

The young lady had *not*, but for some far-reaching feminine reason, chose to ignore it at that moment, when her late tumble in the snow was still fresh in her mind.

"And this woman—whoever she may be——" continued Mrs. Rightbody.

"How do you know there's a woman in the case?" interrupted Miss Alice, wickedly, I fear.

"How do—I—know—there's a woman?" slowly ejaculated Mrs. Rightbody, floundering in the snow and the unexpected possibility of such a ridiculous question. But here her guide flew to her assistance, and estopped further speech. And indeed a grave problem was before them.

The road that led to their single place of refuge—a cabin, half hotel, half trading-post, scarce a mile away—skirted the base of the rocky dome, and passed perilously near the precipitous wall of the valley. There was a rapid descent of a hundred yards or more to this terrace-like passage, and the guides paused for a moment of consultation, coolly oblivious alike to the terrified questioning of Mrs. Rightbody or the half-insolent independence of the daughter. The elder guide was russet-bearded, stout, and humorous; the younger was dark-bearded, slight, and serious.

"Ef you kin get young Bunker Hill to let you tote her on your shoulders, I'll git the madam to hang on to me," came to Mrs. Rightbody's horrified ears as the expression of her particular companion.

"Freeze to the old gal, and don't reckon on me if the daughter starts in to play it alone," was the enigmatical response of the younger guide.

Miss Alice overheard both propositions; and before the

two men returned to their side, that high-spirited young lady had urged her horse down the declivity.

Alas, at this moment a gust of whirling snow swept down upon her. There was a flounder, a mis-step, a fatal strain on the wrong rein, a fall, a few plucky but unavailing struggles, and both horse and rider slid ignominiously down toward the rocky shelf. Mrs. Rightbody screamed. Miss Alice, from a confused *débris* of snow and ice, uplifted a vexed and colouring face to the younger guide—a little the more angrily, perhaps, that she saw a shade of impatience on his face.

“Don’t move, but tie one end of the ‘lass’ under your arms, and throw me the other,” he said quietly.

“What do you mean by ‘lass’—the lasso?” asked Miss Alice disgustedly.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Then why don’t you say so?”

“Oh, Alice!” reproachfully interpolated Mrs. Rightbody, encircled by the elder guide’s stalwart arm.

Miss Alice deigned no reply, but drew the loop of the lasso over her shoulders, and let it drop to her round waist. Then she essayed to throw the other end to her guide. Dismal failure! The first fling nearly knocked her off the ledge, the second went all wild against the rocky wall, the third caught in a thorn bush, twenty feet below her companion’s feet. Miss Alice’s arm sunk helplessly to her side, at which signal of unqualified surrender the younger guide threw himself half-way down the slope, worked his way to the thorn bush, hung for a moment perilously over the parapet, secured the lasso, and then began to pull away at his lovely burden. Miss Alice was no dead weight, however, but steadily half-scrambled on her hands and knees to within a foot or two of her rescuer. At this too familiar proximity, she stood up and leaned a little stiffly against

the line, causing the guide to give an extra pull, which had the lamentable effect of landing her almost in his arms. As it was, her intelligent forehead struck his nose sharply, and, I regret to add, treating of a romantic situation, caused that somewhat prominent sign and token of a hero to bleed freely. Miss Alice instantly clapped a handful of snow over his nostrils.

"Now elevate your right arm," she said commandingly.

He did as he was bidden—but sulkily.

"That compresses the artery."

No man, with a pretty woman's hand and a handful of snow over his mouth and nose, could effectively utter a heroic sentence, nor with his arm elevated stiffly over his head assume a heroic attitude. But when his mouth was free again he said half-sulkily, half-apologetically—

"I might have known a girl couldn't throw worth a cent."

"Why?" demanded Alice sharply.

"Because—why—because—you see—they haven't got the experience," he stammered feebly.

"Nonsense; they haven't the *clavicle*—that's all! It's because I'm a woman, and smaller in the collar-bone, that I haven't the play of the fore-arm which you have. See!" She squared her shoulders slightly, and turned the blaze of her dark eyes full on his. "Experience, indeed! A girl can learn anything a boy can."

Apprehension took the place of ill-humour in her hearer. He turned his eyes hastily away, and glanced above him. The elder guide had gone forward to catch Miss Alice's horse, which, relieved of his rider, was floundering towards the trail. Mrs. Rightbody was nowhere to be seen. And these two were still twenty feet below the trail!

There was an awkward pause.

"Shall I pull you up the same way?" he queried. Miss Alice looked at his nose, and hesitated. "Or will

you take my hand?" he added, in surly impatience. To his surprise, Miss Alice took his hand, and they began the ascent together.

But the way was difficult and dangerous. Once or twice her feet slipped on the smoothly-worn rock beneath, and she confessed to an inward thankfulness when her uncertain feminine hand-grip was exchanged for his strong arm around her waist. Not that he was ungentle, but Miss Alice angrily felt that he had once or twice exercised his superior masculine functions in a rough way; and yet the next moment she would have probably rejected the idea that she had even noticed it. There was no doubt, however, that he *was* a little surly.

A fierce scramble finally brought them back in safety to the trail; but in the action Miss Alice's shoulder, striking a projecting boulder, wrung from her a feminine cry of pain, her first sign of womanly weakness. The guide stopped instantly.

"I am afraid I hurt you?"

She raised her brown lashes, a trifle moist from suffering, looked in his eyes, and dropped her own. Why, she could not tell. And yet he had certainly a kind face, despite its seriousness; and a fine face, albeit unshorn and weather-beaten. Her own eyes had never been so near to any man's before, save her lover's; and yet she had never seen so much in even his. She slipped her hand away, not with any reference to him, but rather to ponder over this singular experience, and somehow felt uncomfortable thereat.

Nor was he less so. It was but a few days ago that he had accepted the charge of this young woman from the elder guide, who was the recognised escort of the Rightbody party, having been a former correspondent of her father's. He had been hired like any other guide, but had under-

taken the task with that chivalrous enthusiasm which the average Californian always extends to the sex so rare to him. But the illusion had passed, and he had dropped into a sulky practical sense of his situation, perhaps fraught with less danger to himself. Only when appealed to by his manhood or her weakness, he had forgotten his wounded vanity.

He strode moodily ahead, dutifully breaking the path for her in the direction of the distant cañon, where Mrs. Rightbody and her friend awaited them. Miss Alice was first to speak. In this trackless, uncharted *terra incognita* of the passions, it is always the woman who steps out to lead the way.

"You know this place very well. I suppose you have lived here long?"

"Yes."

"You were not born here—no?"

A long pause.

"I observe they call you 'Stanislaus Joe.' Of course that is not your real name?" (*Mem.* Miss Alice had never called him *anything*, usually prefacing any request with a languid, "O-er-er, please, mister-er-a!" explicit enough for his station.)

"No."

Miss Alice (trotting after him, and bawling in his ear),
"What name did you say?"

The man (doggedly), "I don't know."

Nevertheless, when they reached the cabin, after a half-hour's buffeting with the storm, Miss Alice applied herself to her mother's escort, Mr. Ryder.

"What's the name of the man who takes care of my horse?"

"Stanislaus Joe," responded Mr. Ryder.

"Is that all?"

"No ; sometimes he's called Joe Stanislaus."

Miss Alice (satirically), "I suppose it's the custom here to send young ladies out with gentlemen who hide their names under an *alias*?"

Mr. Ryder (greatly perplexed), "Why, dear me, Miss Alice, you allers 'peared to me as a gal as was able to take keer——"

Miss Alice (interrupting with a wounded dove-like timidity), "Oh, never mind, please!"

The cabin offered but scanty accommodation to the tourists, which fact, when indignantly presented by Mrs. Rightbody, was explained by the good-humoured Ryder from the circumstance that the usual hotel was only a slight affair of boards, cloth, and paper, put up during the season and partly dismantled in the fall. "You couldn't be kept warm enough there," he added. Nevertheless Miss Alice noticed that both Mr. Ryder and Stanislaus Joe retired there with their pipes, after having prepared the ladies' supper with the assistance of an Indian woman, who apparently emerged from the earth at the coming of the party, and disappeared as mysteriously.

The stars came out brightly before they slept, and the next morning a clear unwinking sun beamed with almost summer power through the shutterless window of their cabin, and ironically disclosed the details of its rude interior. Two or three mangy, half-eaten buffalo robes, a bear-skin, some suspicious-looking blankets, rifles and saddles, deal tables and barrels made up its scant inventory. A strip of faded calico hung before a recess near the chimney, but so blackened by smoke and age that even feminine curiosity respected its secret. Mrs. Rightbody was in high spirits, and informed her daughter that she was at last on the track of her husband's unknown correspondent. "'Seventy-Four and Seventy-Five'

represent two members of the Vigilance Committee, my dear, and Mr. Ryder will assist me to find them."

"Mr. Ryder!" ejaculated Miss Alice, in scornful astonishment.

"Alice," said Mrs. Rightbody, with a suspicious assumption of sudden defence, "you injure yourself—you injure me by this exclusive attitude. Mr. Ryder is a friend of your father's, an exceedingly well-informed gentleman. I have not, of course, imparted to him the extent of my suspicions. But he can help me to what I must and will know. You might treat him a little more civilly—or, at least, a little better than you do his servant, your guide. Mr. Ryder is a gentleman, and not a paid courier."

Miss Alice was suddenly attentive. When she spoke again she asked, "Why do you not find something about this Silsbee—who died—or was hung—or something of that kind?"

"Child," said Mrs. Rightbody, "don't you see, there was no Silsbee, or if there was, he was simply the confidant of that—woman!"

A knock at the door, announcing the presence of Mr. Ryder and Stanislaus Joe with the horses, checked Mrs. Rightbody's speech. As the animals were being packed, Mrs. Rightbody for a moment withdrew in confidential conversation with Mr. Ryder, and, to the young lady's still greater annoyance, left her alone with Stanislaus Joe. Miss Alice was not in a good temper, but she felt it necessary to say something.

"I hope the hotel offers better quarters for travellers than this in summer," she began.

"It does."

"Then this does not belong to it?"

"No, ma'am."

"Who lives here, then?"

"I do."

"I beg your pardon," stammered Miss Alice; "I thought you lived where we hired—where we met you—in—in—you must excuse me."

"I'm not a regular guide, but as times were hard, and I was out of grub, I took the job."

"Out of grub!" "job!" And *she* was the "job." What would Henry Marvin say? It would nearly kill him. She began herself to feel a little frightened, and walked towards the door.

"One moment, miss!"

The young girl hesitated. The man's tone was surly, and yet indicated a certain kind of half-pathetic grievance. Her curiosity got the better of her prudence, and she turned back.

"That morning," he began hastily, "when we were coming down the valley, you picked me up twice."

"I picked *you* up?" repeated the astonished Alice.

"Yes—*contradicted* me, that's what I mean. Once when you said those rocks were volcanic; once when you said the flower you picked was a poppy. I didn't let on at the time, for it wasn't my say; but all the while you were talking I might have laid for you——"

"I don't understand you," said Alice haughtily.

"I might have entrapped you before folks. But I only want you to know that *I'm* right, and here are the books to show it."

He drew aside the dingy calico curtain, revealed a small shelf of bulky books, took down two large volumes, one of botany, one of geology, nervously sought his text, and put them in Alice's outstretched hands.

"I had no intention——" she began, half-proudly, half-embarrassed.

"Am I right, miss?" he interrupted.

"I presume you are, if you say so."

"That's all, ma'am ! Thank you."

Before the girl had time to reply, he was gone. When he again returned, it was with her horse, and Mrs. Rightbody and Ryder were awaiting her. But Miss Alice noticed that his own horse was missing.

"Are you not going with us ?" she asked.

"No, ma'am."

"Oh, indeed !"

Miss Alice felt her speech was a feeble conventionalism, but it was all she could say. She, however, *did* something. Hitherto it had been her habit to systematically reject his assistance in mounting to her seat. Now she awaited him. As he approached, she smiled and put out her little foot. He instantly stooped ; she placed it in his hand, rose with a spring, and for one supreme moment Stanislaus Joe held her unresistingly in his arms. The next moment she was in the saddle, but in that brief interval of sixty seconds she had uttered a volume in a single sentence—

"I hope you will forgive me !"

He muttered a reply, and turned his face aside quickly, as if to hide it.

Miss Alice cantered forward with a smile, but pulled her hat down over her eyes as she joined her mother. She was blushing.

PART III.

MR. RYDER was as good as his word. A day or two later he entered Mrs. Rightbody's parlour at the Chrysopolis Hotel in Stockton, with the information that he had seen the mysterious senders of the despatch, and that they were now in the office of the hotel waiting her pleasure.

Mr. Ryder further informed her that these gentlemen had only stipulated that they should not reveal their real names, and that they should be introduced to her simply as the respective "Seventy-Four" and "Seventy-Five" who had signed the despatch sent to the late Mr. Rightbody.

Mrs. Rightbody at first demurred to this; but on the assurance from Mr. Ryder that this was the only condition on which an interview would be granted, finally consented.

"You will find them square men, even if they are a little rough, ma'am; but if you'd like me to be present, I'll stop; though I reckon if ye'd calkilated on that, you'd have had me take care o' your business by proxy, and not come yourself three thousand miles to do it."

Mrs. Rightbody believed it better to see them alone.

"All right, ma'am. I'll hang round out here, and ef ye should happen to hev a ticklin' in your throat and a bad spell o' coughin'. I'll drop in, careless like, to see if you don't want them drops. *Sabe?*"

And with an exceedingly arch wink, and a slight familiar tap on Mrs. Rightbody's shoulder, which might have caused the late Mr. Rightbody to burst his sepulchre, he withdrew.

A very timid, hesitating tap on the door was followed by the entrance of two men, both of whom in general size, strength, and uncouthness, were ludicrously inconsistent with their diffident announcement. They proceeded in Indian file to the centre of the room, faced Mrs. Rightbody, acknowledged her deep courtesy by a strong shake of the hand, and drawing two chairs opposite to her, sat down side by side.

"I presume I have the pleasure of addressing——" began Mrs. Rightbody.

The man directly opposite Mrs. Rightbody turned to the other inquiringly.

The other man nodded his head, and replied—

“Seventy-Four.”

“Seventy-Five,” promptly followed the other.

Mrs. Rightbody paused, a little confused.

“I have sent for you,” she began again, “to learn something more of the circumstances under which you gentlemen sent a despatch to my late husband.”

“The circumstances,” replied Seventy-Four quietly, with a side glance at his companion, “panned out about in this yer style. We hung a man named Josh Silsbee down at Deadwood for hoss-stealin’. When I say *we*, I speak for Seventy-Five yer, as is present, as well as representin’, so to speak, seventy-two other gents as is scattered. We hung Josh Silsbee on squar, pretty squar evidence. Afore he was strung up, Seventy-Five yer axed him, accordin’ to custom, ef there was ennything he had to say, or enny request that he allowed to make of us. He turns to Seventy-Five yer, and——”

Here he paused suddenly, looking at his companion.

“He sez, sez he,” began Seventy-Five, taking up the narrative; “he sez, ‘Kin I write a letter?’ sez he. Sez I, ‘Not much, ole man; ye’ve got no time.’ Sez he, ‘Kin I send a despatch by telegraph?’ I sez, ‘Heave ahead.’ He sez—these is his dientikal words—‘Send to Adams Rightbody, Boston. Tell him to remember his sacred compack with me thirty years ago.’”

“‘His sacred compack with me thirty years ago,’” echoed Seventy-Four. “His dientikal words.”

“What was the compact?” asked Mrs. Rightbody anxiously.

Seventy-Four looked at Seventy-Five, and then both arose and retired to the corner of the parlour, where they engaged in a slow but whispered deliberation. Presently they returned, and sat down again.

"We allow," said Seventy-Four quietly but decidedly, "that *you* know what that sacred compact was."

Mrs. Rightbody lost her temper and her truthfulness together. "Of course," she said hurriedly, "I know; but do you mean to say that you gave this poor man no further chance to explain before you murdered him?"

Seventy-Four and Seventy-Five both rose again slowly and retired. When they returned again and sat down, Seventy-Five, who by this time, through some subtle magnetism, Mrs. Rightbody began to recognise as the superior power, said gravely—

"We wish to say, regarding this yer murder, that Seventy-Four and me is equally responsible. That we reckon also to represent, so to speak, seventy-two other gentlemen as is scattered. That we are ready, Seventy-Four and me, to take and holt that responsibility now and at any time, afore every man or men as kin be fetched agin us. We wish to say that this yer say of ours holds good yer in Californy or in any part of these United States."

"Or in Canady," suggested Seventy-Four.

"Or in Canady. We wouldn't agree to cross the water or go to furrin parts, unless absolutely necessary. We leaves the chise of weppings to your principal, ma'am, or being a lady, ma'am, and interested, to any one you may fetch to act for him. An advertisement in any of the Sacramento papers, or a playcard or handbill stuck into a tree near Deadwood saying that Seventy-Four or Seventy-Five will communicate with this yer principal or agent of yours, will fetch us—allers."

Mrs. Rightbody, a little alarmed and desperate, saw her blunder. "I mean nothing of the kind," she said hastily. "I only expected that you might have some further details of this interview with Silsbee—that perhaps you could tell

me—" a bold bright thought crossed Mrs. Rightbody's mind, "something more about *her*."

The two men looked at each other.

"I suppose your society have no objection to giving me information about *her*?" said Mrs. Rightbody eagerly.

Another quiet conversation in the corner, and the return of both men.

"We want to say that we've no objection."

Mrs. Rightbody's heart beat high. Her boldness had made her penetration good. Yet she felt she must not alarm the men heedlessly.

"Will you inform me to what extent Mr. Rightbody, my late husband, was interested in *her*?"

This time it seemed an age to Mrs. Rightbody before the men returned from their solemn consultation in the corner. She could both hear and feel that their discussion was more animated than their previous conferences. She was a little mortified, however, when they sat down, to hear Seventy-Four say slowly—

"We wish to say that we don't allow to say *how* much."

"Do you not think that the 'sacred compact' between Mr. Rightbody and Mr. Silsbee referred to *her*?"

"We reckon it do."

Mrs. Rightbody, flushed and animated, would have given worlds had her daughter been present to hear this undoubted confirmation of her theory. Yet she felt a little nervous and uncomfortable, even on this threshold of discovery.

"Is she here now?"

"She's in Tuolumne," said Seventy-Four.

"A little better looked arter than formerly," added Seventy-Five.

"I see. Then Mr. Silsbee *enticed* her away?"

"Well, ma'am, it *was* allowed as she runned away. But it wasn't proved, and it generally wasn't her style."

Mrs. Rightbody trifled with her next question. "She was pretty, of course?"

The eyes of both men brightened.

"She was *that!*" said Seventy-Four emphatically.

"It would have done you good to see her," added Seventy-Five.

Mrs. Rightbody inwardly doubted it; but before she could ask another question, the two men again retired to the corner for consultation. When they came back there was a shade more of kindness and confidence in their manner, and Seventy-Four opened his mind more freely.

"We wish to say, ma'am, looking at the thing, by and large, in a far-minded way—that *ez you* seem interested, and *ez* Mr. Rightbody was interested, and was according to all accounts deceived and led away by Silsbee, that we don't mind listening to any proposition *you* might make, as a lady—allowin' you was ekally interested."

"I understand," said Mrs. Rightbody quickly. "And you will furnish me with any papers."

The two men again consulted.

"We wish to say, ma'am, that we think she's got papers, but——"

"I *must* have them, you understand," interrupted Mrs. Rightbody, "at any price!"

"We was about to say, ma'am," said Seventy-Five slowly, "that, considerin' all things—and you being a lady—you kin have *her*, papers, pedigree, and guarantee, for twelve hundred dollars!"

It has been alleged that Mrs. Rightbody asked only one question more, and then fainted. It is known, however, that by the next day it was understood in Deadwood that Mrs. Rightbody had confessed to the Vigilance Committee that her husband, a celebrated Boston millionaire, anxious

to gain possession of Abner Springer's well-known sorrel mare, had incited the unfortunate Josh Silsbee to steal it; and that finally, failing in this, the widow of the deceased Boston millionaire was now in personal negotiation with the owners.

Howbeit, Miss Alice, returning home that afternoon, found her mother with a violent headache.

"We will leave here by the next steamer," said Mrs. Rightbody languidly. "Mr. Ryder has promised to accompany us."

"But, mother——"

"The climate, Alice, is over-rated. My nerves are already suffering from it. The associations are unfit for you, and Mr. Marvin is naturally impatient."

Miss Alice coloured slightly.

"But your quest, mother?"

"I've abandoned it."

"But *I* have not," said Alice quietly. "Do you remember my guide at the Yo Semite, Stanislaus Joe? Well, Stanislaus Joe is—who do you think?"

Mrs. Rightbody was languidly indifferent.

"Well, Stanislaus Joe is the son of Joshua Silsbee."

Mrs. Rightbody sat upright in astonishment.

"Yes; but, mother, he knows nothing of what we know. His father treated him shamefully, and set him cruelly adrift years ago; and when he was hung, the poor fellow, in sheer disgrace, changed his name."

"But if he knows nothing of his father's compact, of what interest is this?"

"Oh, nothing! Only I thought it might lead to something."

Mrs. Rightbody suspected that "something," and asked sharply, "And pray how did *you* find it out? You did not speak of it in the Valley."

"Oh, I didn't find it out till to-day," said Miss Alice, walking to the window. "He happened to be here, and—told me."

PART IV.

IF Mrs. Rightbody's friends had been astounded by her singular and unexpected pilgrimage to California so soon after her husband's decease, they were still more astounded by the information a year later that she was engaged to be married to a Mr. Ryder, of whom only the scant history was known that he was a Californian, and former correspondent of her husband. It was undeniable that the man was wealthy, and evidently no mere adventurer; it was rumoured that he was courageous and manly; but even those who delighted in his odd humour were shocked at his grammar and slang. It was said that Mr. Marvin had but one interview with his father-in-law elect, and returned so supremely disgusted that the match was broken off. The horse-stealing story, more or less garbled, found its way through lips that pretended to decry it, yet eagerly repeated it. Only one member of the Rightbody family—and a new one—saved them from utter ostracism. It was young Mr. Ryder, the adopted son of the prospective head of the household, whose culture, manners, and general elegance fascinated and thrilled Boston with a new sensation. It seemed to many that Miss Alice should in the vicinity of this rare exotic forget her former enthusiasm for a professional life, but the young man was pitied by society, and various plans for diverting him from any *mésalliance* with the Rightbody family were concocted.

It was a wintry night, and the second anniversary of Mr. Rightbody's death, that a light was burning in his

library. But the dead man's chair was occupied by young Mr. Ryder, adopted son of the new proprietor of the mansion, and before him stood Alice, with her dark eyes fixed on the table.

"There must have been something in it, Joe, believe me. Did you never hear your father speak of mine?"

"Never."

"But you say he was college bred, and born a gentleman, and in his youth he must have had many friends."

"Alice," said the young man gravely, "when I have done something to redeem my name, and wear it again before these people, before *you*, it would be well to revive the past. But till then——"

But Alice was not to be put down. "I remember," she went on, scarcely heeding him, "that when I came in that night, papa was reading a letter, and seemed to be disconcerted."

"A letter?"

"Yes; but," added Alice, with a sigh, "when we found him here insensible, there was no letter on his person. He must have destroyed it."

"Did you ever look among his papers? If found, it might be a clue."

The young man glanced toward the cabinet. Alice read his eyes, and answered—

"Oh dear, no. The cabinet contained only his papers, all perfectly arranged—you know how methodical were his habits—and some old business and private letters, all carefully put away."

"Let us see them," said the young man, rising.

They opened drawer after drawer; files upon files of letters and business papers, accurately folded and filed. Suddenly Alice uttered a little cry, and picked up a quaint ivory paper-knife lying at the bottom of a drawer.

"It was missing the next day, and never could be found. He must have mislaid it here. This is the drawer," said Alice eagerly.

Here was a clue. But the lower part of the drawer was filled with old letters, not labelled, yet neatly arranged in files. Suddenly he stopped, and said, "Put them back, Alice, at once."

"Why?"

"Some of these letters are in my father's handwriting."

"The more reason why I should see them," said the girl imperatively. "Here, you take part and I'll take part, and we'll get through quicker."

There was a certain decision and independence in her manner which he had learned to respect. He took the letters, and in silence read them with her. They were old college letters, so filled with boyish dreams, ambitions, aspirations, and Utopian theories, that I fear neither of these young people even recognised their parents in the dead ashes of the past. They were both grave, until Alice uttered a little hysterical cry, and dropped her face in her hands. Joe was instantly beside her.

"It's nothing, Joe, nothing. Don't read it, please; please, don't. It's so funny—it's so very queer."

But Joe had, after a slight, half-playful struggle, taken the letter from the girl. Then he read aloud the words written by his father thirty years ago.

"I thank you, dear friend, for all you say about my wife and boy. I thank you for reminding me of our boyish compact. He will be ready to fulfil it, I know, if he loves those his father loves, even if you should marry years later. I am glad for your sake, for both our sakes, that it is a boy. Heaven send you a good wife, dear Adams, and a daughter, to make my son equally happy."

Joe Silsbee looked down, took the half-laughing, half-tearful face in his hands, kissed her forehead, and with tears in his grave eyes, said "Amen!"

.

I am inclined to think that this sentiment was echoed heartily by Mrs. Rightbody's former acquaintances, when, a year later, Miss Alice was united to a professional gentleman of honour and renown, yet who was known to be the son of a convicted horse-thief. A few remembered the previous Californian story, and found corroboration therefor; but a majority believed it a just reward to Miss Alice for her conduct to Mr. Marvin, and as Miss Alice cheerfully accepted it in that light, I do not see why I may not end my story with happiness to all concerned.

THE END.

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